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LORD LISLE'S DAUGHTER.

Lord Lisle's Daughter.

A NOVEL.

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME,

Author of "Dora Thorne," "Madolin's Lover," &c.

NEW YORK:

THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,
No. 65 DUANE STREET.

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LORD LISLE'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN artist might have sketched Deepdale as the model and type of an English village. It nestled amid the Devonshire hills, trying to hide itself under the spreading shade of tall trees. The bonny Deeplow Woods half inclosed it; smiling corn fields, green meadows, and pleasant gardens gave it a quiet, varied charm. The deep, broad stream, the River Floss, ran by it; far off in the distance lay the chain of blue hills that sloped down to the sea.

They were a simple, kindly race, the people who dwelt in Deepdale—far behind the rest of the world in knowledge.

The weather and the crops were their two chief subjects of conversation and anxiety. Strangers seldom came near the village; the railway had not broken upon its tranquil calm. There were many such quiet, sunny nooks in old England years ago, but they are rare now.

The houses were scattered; there was no regular street; a group of cottages stood under the tall poplar-trees; another in the midst of flower gardens; little villas were dotted here and there, half hidden by luxuriant foliage.

Perhaps the most picturesque spot in Deepdale was Meadow Lane, one of those broad green lanes only seen in England; the hedges filled with wild roses and eglantine; hawthorn-trees perfuming the clear, summer air, and wild flowers growing in rich profusion.

A little cottage stood at the end of the lane. Claude

Lorraine would have made a grand picture of it. A little cottage, with bright windows encircled by guelder roses and woodbines; and the white jasmine flowers shone like pale stars. A group of tall chestnut-trees stood near, and a pretty brook ran singing by.

On this evening, when our story opens, a young lady arrived at Deepdale. She came from some neighboring town, in a shabby, worn-out fly, bringing with her a large box and a little child. The driver, obeying the lady's directions, inquired for Mrs. Rivers, of Rosemary Cottage; and some of the village people, attracted and half dazzled by the fly, shabby as it was, showed the way to the cottage in Meadow Lane. But there were places where the brook widened, and the carriage could not pass. The lady quickly solved the difficulty; she bade the driver go to the village inn, and send the box on to the cottage, and she herself took the child in her arms.

"Tell me," she said, gently, "how long you can wait. Give me as much time as you can."

"I must be back by eleven if possible," he replied.

"Then I will be at the inn by ten," she said, turning from him, and clasping the child in her arms. She walked quickly down the green lane; then she sat down upon the trunk of an old tree and gazed around her.

The child in the lady's arms stirred, and she bent over it, kissing the little face with a wistful love pitiful to see; then she placed the child down for a few minutes, standing by her side.

"This will be my darling's home," she said to herself; "and I could wish for no fairer one."

Pensively she gazed upon the child; then she rose, took up her precious treasure and walked on to the cottage, and gently rapped at the door. It was opened by a clean, kindly looking woman, who cried out with delight when she saw who stood there.

"I never believed it," she said. "Can it really be

you, Miss Margaret? I thought the news too good to be true."

"It is quite true, nurse. I could not leave my darling in any care but yours."

Mrs. Rivers took the child from the lady's arms, and placed a large chair for her.

"I have not long to stay," said the fair young visitor; "let me keep baby in my arms while I can."

"That you shall," replied Mrs. Rivers, gently; "it is hard enough for you. Ah, Miss Margaret—I call you 'miss' still—I can not remember that you are a married lady, with a baby of your own. It is not long since I nursed you."

"Not so very long," was the reply; "but I have lived many lives since then."

As the lady spoke a look of pain passed over her lovely features.

"All my other troubles seem like play, nurse," she continued, "in comparison with the parting from my little child."

A sudden mist of tears gathered in her eyes as she spoke.

"Calm yourself," said the nurse. "I will make you some tea, and then you shall tell me your story."

While Mrs. Rivers busied herself in preparing tea, the lady sat with the child in her arms. She laid her fair young face on the little golden head, murmuring sweet words of love never forgotten by the one who heard them.

The western sunbeams came in at the open window; but they brought no message of hope for her, whose heart was sad even unto death.

She tried to drink the tea kind hands brought her; but the homely cakes, the golden honey, and ripe fruit, Mrs. Rivers offered her in vain.

"Now, my dear," said the nurse, when the simple meal ended, "come out into the garden. You shall sit under the laburnum-tree while you tell me all about it—

where your husband has gone—why you are going—what is the mystery. Tell me, for you know you can trust me.”

As she spoke the nurse placed a chair outside the porch, and then seated herself by the lady's side; and the child, as though knowing how soon those tender arms must loose their hold, lay silent and still.

“I have not much to tell,” the lady began. “You left my father's house when he failed; he did not live long after that. My mother took me to London and put me to school there. She died when I reached my fifteenth year, and I was left quite alone. I wrote to you sometimes; but with that one exception there was no human being who took any interest in me. My father's friends, who courted me when he was rich, forgot my existence even.

“Just before my mother's death she placed me as governess-pupil in a school near London. In return for the lessons I gave I was taught many accomplishments. In my nineteenth year I left there to take my first situation as governess—it was considered a very good one. I had the charge of Colonel Seaton's two little children, who reside at Hurst Hall, in Norfolk.

“I was happy there; the colonel and Mrs. Seaton were very kind to me. Ah, nurse! I am trying to tell you my story; but how can I? I can not paint the glorious colors of this evening sky, I can not put to music the song of the bird, nor can I describe the change that came over my life when he who is now my husband began to love me.

“I was but a child when my father failed and died. After that my life seemed one long, dull, gray-colored dream. Of the pleasures, the innocent happiness of young girls, I knew nothing. I had never even cared whether my face were fair or not; but one evening—ah, me! how vividly that scene returns—one evening I had done something that did not please Mrs. Seaton, and she spoke angrily to me. When the children had gone to bed, and my time

was my own, I went out into the garden. I had been asked to train some choice rose-trees, and as I bent over the roses the tears fell from my eyes upon the flowers.

“Not tears such as I shed now, full of bitterness, but hopeless tears that had in them no aching sorrow—nothing but a desolate weariness. Suddenly, standing before me, I saw a gentleman—a young and handsome man. He spoke to me, saying he had come some long distance to see Colonel Seaton.

“I told him Colonel and Mrs. Seaton would both be in at eight o’clock, and if he particularly wished to see them, he had better wait, or call again. He decided upon waiting. Then he looked at me, nurse, with such kind, grave eyes, and asked me if I were in trouble, that I had been weeping so bitterly.

“‘I had no trouble,’ I replied, ‘but I was tired of my life.’

“He stood and talked to me, saying such brave, noble words I can never forget them. And as he spoke the sun seemed to shine more brightly, the flowers gave forth a sweeter fragrance, his voice made music in my heart—music that has never died out since. From that hour my life changed; it was no longer gray and dull. I lived in a rose-colored dream—a golden light had fallen over me and dazzled my eyes.

“Nurse, I can not tell you my husband’s name. I shall keep no secret from you but that. I promised him, and I must keep my word.”

A look of great anxiety came over Mrs. Rivers’s face, but she made no comment.

“Captain Arthur—I may call him that—remained at Hurst Hall for some weeks. He told me he loved me, and I—oh, dear Heaven! what had I done that such happiness should be mine?—he asked me to be his wife; but our marriage was to be kept quite secret. I will tell you why. My husband, like myself, has no parents. They

died when he was quite a child, and he was adopted by an uncle, who educated him, bought his commission, and promised to look well to his future prospects. I must not tell you his uncle's name either, nurse, England knows it well. He is a nobleman of high birth, and still higher repute; he has two sons; the eldest, of course, will succeed him; the youngest is in the royal navy. This uncle has always been kind, with this one exception—he would not listen to the idea of any marriage. Captain Arthur must wait, he said; and, as he had no money himself, he must marry an heiress; and threatened that if thwarted in this respect he should withdraw all support and friendship from him.

“So our marriage was a private one. I left my situation one fine morning in June, and drove straight to a church—one of the largest and oldest in London. Captain Arthur met me there; we were married, and then he took me home. Our home; was a pretty villa among the Highgate Hills. As much happiness fell to my share in that one short year as some people enjoy in a life-time. Our secret was never discovered. I was known as Mrs. Howard—my mother's maiden name. At the year's end just after my little child was born, my husband's regiment was ordered to India. The doctor forbid me going with him—and we parted. It was arranged that I should join him when baby would be strong enough and old enough to stand the voyage. But they tell me, nurse, that she would not live there, where the sun scorches and burns. I should not leave her yet; but my husband is very ill. The last three mails have brought me sad news from him; he is very ill, and pines for me. What can I do? My heart is torn between my husband and my child. The doctor, who is my old friend, says she would die before she had been in India a week. My Arthur may die, unless I can go to nurse him; and I thought of many plans, but there is no one to whom I can trust my child but you, my faithful

friend. I have no relations in the world, and in my sorrow I have sought you. I leave England to-morrow. Will you take charge of my child for three years? I will reward you handsomely at the end of that time, when I shall return and make some further arrangements. What do you say, nurse? Will you undertake the trust?"

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a moment of unbroken silence when the lady ceased speaking, and the woman by her side answered gravely:

"I accept the charge, my dear. I will take care of your child as though she were my own. God bless and preserve you, Miss Margaret! I hope Captain Arthur is good and true?"

"Good?" said the clear voice. "I have never seen any one like him, nurse! He is kind, tender, and loving. One word from him means more than the vow of another. He is the soul of honor and truth." The pale, sweet face brightened as she spoke. "You, too, have a little daughter," she continued. "Where is she? Will you let me see her?"

"I have a pretty child," said Mrs. Rivers, "and, Miss Margaret, I named her after you, but we call her 'Rita.' My poor husband used to say Margaret was too long for every-day use. She is gone to one of my neighbors. I will fetch her."

In a few minutes the woman returned, leading by the hand a beautiful child of four years old—a child Murillo would have been charmed with—dark in features and eyes, with black, shining hair clustering in thick waves upon her pretty shoulders; lips as ripe and red as cherries, and little white teeth that gleamed like pearls.

The lady cried out in admiration when she saw her, and a look of gratified vanity stole over the lovely childish face.

"Ah!" said the nurse, "my little Rita is very pretty, but I look upon beauty as a 'fatal dower.' What has it done for you, Miss Margaret, my dear?—and there never was a sweeter face than yours. Your little one is not like you."

"No," replied the lady. "My hair and eyes are dark; her little curls are like pale gold; her eyes are blue as a summer sky. I do not know whether others would form the same opinion as I, but to me she has an angel's face."

She then raised her own child in her arms. The little girl was nearly three years old, and a greater contrast to the dark-featured Rita could not have been found. She was small, but every little limb was most exquisitely shaped. The head was one that Raphael would have sketched for a child-angel, running over with golden curls; a fair, spiritual face, bearing even then an impress of high-bred refinement; delicate white arms and hands, fair as a lily, and exquisitely shaped.

As the lady held the child she kissed the sweet face with a passionate love pitiful to see.

"We are three Margarets," she said, with a smile. "You must call my darling 'Daisy,' nurse—she looks like a pretty pale flower—'Daisy Howard;' and some time I will surprise her by giving her a name far prettier than that—her own. Rita, you will be kind to Daisy, will you not?"

The two children played upon the grass together, while the lady in rapid, nervous words continued her instructions.

"I have brought you forty pounds, nurse," she said. "As soon as I reach India I will send you more. Spare no expense over my child. Let her be daintily dressed and cared for. I have had a portrait taken of her—three, in fact. One is for her papa, one for myself, and to-night, or to-morrow, before leaving, I will send you the other."

There was a sharp ring of pain in the lady's voice, as

she continued: "I have a locket for her. It contains her father's hair and mine, with our initials—M. and A.—intwined. I shall leave her this ring. My husband gave it to me the night before he went. It is of rare pearls; and the motto inside it says, 'No love out of this ring.' And oh, nurse," she continued, bursting into a wild passion of weeping, "take care of her! Do not let her forget me. Morning and night let her fold her little hands and pray for the loving mother so far away."

"That she shall do," said the nurse, gently.

"Three years will soon pass," said the sad young mother. "But I know now what people suffer when they come to die. Death can hold no deeper sorrow than this."

"You will see her again," said Mrs. Rivers, gently, "and she will soon learn to be happy."

"Happy without me!" sighed the lady. "But time presses. Let me have her to myself, nurse, for one half hour. I must leave you before ten."

She quitted the pretty, fragrant garden where her feet were never more to tread, and followed the nurse into a little bedroom. A white bed with white hangings stood there, and the lady knelt by it, holding the child in her arms.

"Take care of her, ye heavenly guardians!" she cried. "It rends my heart to leave her. My darling," she continued, raising the little sweet face to her own, "shall you forget me? Let my kisses lie warm on your lips. Look at me. Let my face sink into your heart. I shall come to you in your dreams. In my dreams I shall feel the clasp of your tender hands—the warm breath upon my cheek. I shall hear by day and by night the music of your pretty voice and the sound of your footsteps. My heart stays with you. I call upon Heaven to guard my little child while I am away!"

Her warm tears rained upon the wee golden head, and then she began to murmur sweet, caressing words, such

as only loving mothers use. The child's eyes closed, and she laid it down upon the white bed.

Just then the nurse came once more to the door.

"It is growing late, my dear," she said.

"My baby is asleep," replied the lady; "I will leave her now."

She bent over the little face, and for the last time pressed her quivering lips fervently upon it.

"Good-bye, my darling! good-bye, my pretty little child!" she moaned, as she quitted the room. "Do not speak to me, nurse; the bitterness of death is upon me—my heart is breaking!"

With quiet, womanly patience Mrs. Rivers stood until the storm of weeping passed over and the pale, wild face grew still. They spoke no word while the elder woman wrapped the thin shawl round the childish figure.

"Shall I go with you, my dear, to the inn?" she asked, gently.

"No; do not leave the children," replied the lady; "I shall be better alone."

She bent her head on the nurse's shoulder, then kissed her face with lips so white and cold they startled her old friend. She said nothing; her sorrow was too deep for words.

"Tell me what ship you sail in?" asked Mrs. Rivers. "Our doctor takes the papers, and he will know when it reaches India."

"It is called the 'Ocean Queen,'" replied the lady; "it sails to-morrow. I shall write to you by every mail, nurse, and you must do the same to me; and in three years' time, should Providence will it, I shall return, and she will not have forgotten me."

"She will not forget you, my dear; she will see your face every night in her dreams," said Mrs. Rivers. "God speed you and send you back to us in safety."

The lady lingered for a few minutes near the cottage

door, longing to look once more at the sleeping child; but as she stood, the church clock chimed the hour of ten, and she turned with rapid steps to walk down the lane. She could weep alone there, and call her baby's name. There was no more need to repress the bitter sorrow—the sighs and tears that could not be controlled.

The last memory that lived with the sad young mother was of the starlit sky and the fragrant green lane. She walked on rapidly; and having reached the little inn, where the carriage was waiting for her, she immediately took her departure.

On the following day the postman brought a little packet to Rosemary Cottage. Mrs. Rivers opened it, and cried out with delight at the pretty picture it contained. “Daisy's portrait,” was written on it; “sent by her mother, June 16th, 18—.” The picture of a sweetly pretty little face with blue eyes and a beautiful head running over with golden curls. There was a long letter containing many directions, one of which was that the golden curls should not be cut, but should be allowed to grow.

Mrs. Rivers took the little portrait, and, reaching the Bible from the shelf, placed it there with the letter. Nothing warned her, as she did so, that by this simple act she was in some measure shaping the destiny of three lives. Both letter and picture lay there for many years; they were not seen again until the night when the fate of Daisy and Rita trembled in the balance.

It is a strange story, but one hears of stranger every day. Sixteen years ago, Margaret Howard, as she called herself, was the petted, indulged heiress of Stephen Arle, a rich merchant, who lived in one of the southern counties of England. Susan Rivers was her nurse, and very dearly did she love the pretty child of whom she had charge.

During all these years Susan Rivers never lost sight of her mistress and little Margaret! She went occasionally to see them, and was not happy or contented unless she

heard, at stated times, from them. But Susan married soon after Mrs. Arle died, and went away to Deepdale. She married her cousin, a handsome, dark-eyed sailor, who had loved her for many years.

Margaret wrote to tell her old nurse she was married, and again when her baby was born; but Susan Rivers had cares and sorrows of her own. Her husband died, and she mourned long for him. He left a little fortune behind him—just sufficient to keep his wife and child in comfort.

When the nurse heard again from Margaret, it was to ask if she would take charge of her child, the result of which has been detailed.

When Captain Arthur's wife set sail in the "Ocean Queen," no one in the world knew to whom she had confided her little daughter except Mrs. Markham, a widow, who lived as servant in her house. Mrs. Markham was sorry to leave the gentle young mistress who had been so kind to her; but she was going to join her brother in America. She left England the day after the "Ocean Queen" sailed for India. The tragic story of Lord Lisle's daughter turned upon this simple incident. Had Mrs. Markham remained in England it would never have been written.

The captain's young wife thought there would be plenty of time when she reached India for telling her husband all about Nurse Rivers and the pretty home at Deepdale where she had left her little child.

The sea holds many secrets; one of them is how the "Ocean Queen" was lost. It sailed from England with more than two hundred souls on board and a valuable cargo. It was wrecked in the vast Pacific Ocean—no one knew where or how. The good ship "Trident" picked up a board still bearing the proud name of "Ocean Queen;" but the secret of the mighty deep was never told. None knew what cruel storms and driving winds

had sent the vessel to its ruin. No one heard the agonized cries for help that died on the vast, solitary ocean.

One of the last who perished was a lady with a sweet, sad face turned in mute supplication to the darkling sky; one whose last memory was of a brave countenance she was never more to see; of a childish voice she was never more to hear; of a little golden head never more to be pillowed on her breast; of a sunny garden where so lately she had sat with the child in her arms; of the fragrant green lane and the starlit night when she had wept aloud for the little one who was never to call her mother again.

It was long before the loss of the "Ocean Queen" was known in England or in India. To Captain Arthur Wyverne, lying ill under the burning sun, longing for the wife whose presence would bring him new life, it proved almost a death-blow. But sorrow and despair were unavailing now. The sea kept its own secret; the wind and waves chanted a requiem over those who had perished with the ill-fated vessel.

CHAPTER III.

THE news reached Deepdale at last. The day came when the good nurse's friend, the doctor, called upon her and showed her the paragraph in the paper that told how the "Ocean Queen" was lost, and in what latitude the "Trident" found some portion of the wreck floating on the ocean.

It seemed incredible to Mrs. Rivers that one whom she had tenderly nursed and loved should have met with so tragic a fate; that the bright, hopeful life should end in the spring-tide of beauty. She took little Daisy in her arms, and promised she would take her mother's place, and the little one smiled at her kisses and tears, all unconscious of the loss no earthly love could ever repair.

Months rolled on and no tidings came to Mrs. Rivers. No one wrote about the child; no one claimed it. From over the Indian seas there came no anxious word from an anxious father. Months became years, and the silence was still unbroken. She could not write to Daisy's father, for she knew nothing of his name or address. At length Mrs. Rivers felt sure that one of the two things had happened. Either the marriage had not been a legal one, and the captain neither wished nor intended to claim his child, or he was dead, and no one else knew of its existence.

When two years had passed away, the good widow gave up all thoughts of hearing from any one, or of her having to give up the child she loved dearly as her own. She never spoke to little Daisy of the sad young mother who had brought her to Deepdale. She never named the brave soldier-father far away under the hot Indian skies. Daisy, who never forgot the word, called the nurse "mamma," and was brought up as one of Susan Rivers's own children. At times she asked herself was this silence wise, and one look at the child's happy face convinced her it was so. Why disturb the sweet, happy content by speaking of hopes and dreams that might never be realized? Daisy was happy, loving Mrs. Rives as her mother and the beautiful, vivacious Rita as her sister.

So Daisy grew—all unconscious of her own story. They lived in the little cottage at Deepdale until Daisy was seven years old. Then some little accession of fortune came to the widow. An old uncle died, leaving her a small house and a few hundred pounds; and they left Deepdale to go to Queen's Lynne, on the Norfolk coast, where the property was situated.

It was a great change from the sunny village nestling in the Devonshire hills to the bleak, bare coast and the deep, surging sea. The children disliked it at first; they missed the fragrant garden, the green meadows, and fair flowers. But the sea-shore had its charms—the long, yellow sands

—the wonder of shell and weed—the restless waves that rolled in and out!

There was another great advantage that Mrs. Rivers had not overlooked. At Queen's Lynne there were schools, where, at a moderate rate, it was possible to procure a really good and sound education for her children. She wished them both to be well educated and lady-like. Whatever might be Daisy's future, she ought to receive the best training she could afford her; then, if ever she were claimed by those who had a right to her, she could take her place among them without shame. As for Rita, she gave promise of such magnificent beauty that her mother began to form ambitious hopes and plans for her.

Mrs. Rivers had been for years at a good school herself, where she had received a plain, sensible education. She spoke well and grammatically. Quick to learn, she had caught up the refined tone and accent of her mistress. Listening to Rita and Daisy, one felt sure they had been accustomed to speak with intelligent people. There was nothing broad or provincial in their accent. Both were gifted with musical voices—Rita's, rich, clear, and ringing; Daisy's, sweet as the murmur of the summer wind.

The house left to Mrs. Rivers was known as Rooks' Nest; so called from the fact that near the cottage stood a fine group of trees wherein the rooks for many long years had built their nests. The new tenant was looked upon as a most respectable woman—not admissible among "the gentry" of Queen's Lynne, but certainly much superior to the "poorer class." The widow had quite enough to do in managing her household; it was sometimes hard work to pay her way and provide all that was wanted for the two young girls.

The years passed over, and no word ever came of little Daisy's friends. The two girls went to school; they were both quick, and learned rapidly; but there was a great dif-

ference in their motives. Daisy loved study for its own sake. Rita looked upon it as a means to an end.

They did not resemble each other in any way, these two who believed themselves to be sisters. In describing Rita people always called her "beautiful;" in speaking of Daisy one invariably characterized her as "sweet." She had a fair, spiritual face, with calm, clear brows, and tender violet eyes full of truth and purity; her pure, sensitive lips had a smile sweet as a sunbeam; her golden hair rippled over white dimpled shoulders; there was an air of graceful, high-bred refinement about her that did not belong to the more beautiful Rita.

There was nothing worldly in Daisy. She loved her adopted mother, quite believing she was her own. She was proud of her brilliant sister, and perfectly satisfied with her station of life. She had no longing for rich dresses and rare jewels; she wished for books and music. She never felt jealous or envious when the "Lynne Gazette" told of gay balls and fêtes in which she had no share. The world, as yet, had not touched her—its warm, passionate breath had never quickened her pulse or flushed her face.

There was one thing about her that good Mrs. Rivers would fain have seen altered—that was a quiet gravity that at times almost amounted to sadness. At times, too, Daisy startled her nurse.

"Mother!" she said one morning, suddenly, "have I ever seen in my life a lady with a beautiful though sad face, and mournful, loving eyes? I dream so often of such a face, I must have seen it."

Mrs. Rivers was more startled than she cared to own.

"I can not tell, my dear," she replied. "Dreams are all nonsense."

"I used to dream when I was quite a little girl about that same face," said Daisy, "years ago, before we left Deepdale; and I dream of it still. It grows more vague

and indistinct though, and seems to smile more sadly every time the dream comes."

"Why did you never tell me of it before?"

"I can not tell. I heard you say so often that dreams were all nonsense," she replied; "but I must have seen the picture of such a face some time."

It was quite possible that the child still dreamed of her mother. She was nearly three years old when that mother left her to find death in the deep sea. The dream might return; the image or memory of the face might still remain in the child's mind, returning more vividly in her sleeping than in her waking hours.

The question made Nurse Rivers again ask herself whether she ought to tell the young girl the true story of her life.

"Not yet," she said—"not yet! There will be tears enough and sorrow enough in the years to come. I will not awaken her yet."

When Daisy was sixteen, an offer was made to her that pleased her adopted mother. The lady superintendent of a large school in Queen's Lynne, struck with her lady-like demeanor, modest manners, and quick intelligence, offered her a situation as junior teacher in her school. In place of salary she was to receive lessons in music, drawing, and French. Simple, innocent Daisy thought herself in fairy-land. Rita scornfully declared she would not have gone if Miss Toffles had offered her a hundred a year.

"Our ways in life will never be the same, Daisy," said the young beauty. "You have no ambition."

So Daisy went to Miss Toffles, thereby, in some measure, sealing her own fate. The school was some three miles distant, and she was allowed to go home only at stated intervals. There she quickly learned all that Miss Toffles could teach. When Daisy reached her nineteenth year she was both educated and accomplished, and Mrs. Rivers

looked with proud satisfaction upon the girl whom she loved dearly as her own child.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE lovely evening, toward the end of August, a young girl walked slowly down the long stretch of yellow sand. Far out in the distance lay the broad blue sea. The waves rose with a gentle murmur and fell with a musical ripple; the sky was all aflame with gorgeous colors. But neither the beauty of color nor sound made any impression upon the young girl. Never once were her eyes turned to the sky or the sea—never once did she pause and listen to the faint music of the wind and waves.

Yet that countenance should have belonged to one capable of appreciating both. It is seldom that under our cold northern sky a face of such wondrous loveliness is seen. It belonged rather to the daughters of sunny Spain.

It was a face that drew all eyes and charmed all hearts—so bright and glowing, so piquant and charming. Such beauty might have been the dowry of a queen. Nature, in her caprice, had lavished it upon Mrs. Rivers's only child. The slender, girlish figure was graceful and dignified; but Margaret Rivers lacked, with all her beauty, the high-bred air of refinement that characterized her sister Daisy.

The two girls were as dissimilar in mind as in person. Rita was proud to an inordinate degree of her beauty. A vain longing for riches and grandeur consumed her. She longed for all that wealth can procure—for rich dresses and costly jewels. Would she never attend balls and parties? Ah! if she were but rich!—if she could but go among the gay and fashionable! There was no one in looks to compare with her. What was the use of such a face and such a figure if she were to live always unknown at Rooks' Nest? If she could but once gain admittance into the great world, these would soon lie at her feet! Rich

noblemen often married for beauty; so, at least, romances said. Who could tell what might be in store for her? Perhaps wealth—titled honors. She might even live to be one of the queens of that gay world where she longed to shine!

All these thoughts rushed through the vain, worldly heart of Rita as she strolled that summer evening along the sands. Margaret Rivers had fire, passion, force, and a certain kind of cleverness; but of truth and high principle, of true nobility of soul, she had none.

Day by day she sat in the little garden that looked down the high-road, longing, with all the force of her vain, passionate heart, for something to happen which should enable her to gratify her wishes. People looked at the handsome, restless face, and wondered at its expression.

Mrs. Rivers did not understand her own child. She looked wistfully sometimes at the proud girl, and thought how her life was wasted in the solitude of Rooks' Nest. But of the dreams and aspirations—the hopes and longings that filled her daughter's heart—she knew nothing.

A change came at last for Margaret Rivers—not love—at least, not love in its highest, holiest sense of the word; but there came a break in the monotony of her life.

One morning as she was walking from her home to Queen's Lynne, she met a handsome young man, with one of the few young girls she knew. He looked admiringly at Rita, to whom his companion introduced him. All three went to Queen's Lynne together; and, during that walk, Rita learned sufficient to give her a great interest in all that concerned Ralph Ashton. He was a first mate; and, although young, there was no one on the coast so skillful or so trustworthy as he. He told strange stories of foreign countries that he had visited; of gold easily earned and lavishly spent; of wealth that he might accumulate if he only cared to do so.

Then Rita looked at him. Rich—he might be rich, if he had any motive for saving and making money.

“I would give,” she said, firmly, “anything in this world for money. I am tired of living here by the restless, noisy sea. I long to see life as others see it. I should like to wear sweeping dresses and gleaming jewels.”

He interrupted her eagerly:

“So you ought to do—so you will,” he said. “All that is fairest and brightest in this world ought to be laid at your feet. Ah, if it were but mine!”

Rita smiled, but the words sunk deeply into her heart. She met Ralph Ashton again and again—sometimes on the shady high-road and sometimes by the sea-shore. She heeded little the passionate love he had for her, but she thought much of his future. If he were so skillful and clever, if the secrets of deep seas were known to him, and he could trade upon them, it was possible that in time he might be rich and give her her heart's desire. It was true some people spoke strangely of him, and hinted at large cargoes run in during the dead of night, and prophesied that Ralph Ashton's money would never do him any good. But Rita heeded that as little as she did the fierce, passionate love that had mastered him, and brought him a slave to her feet.

Not one word did she ever say to her mother or Daisy relative to this strange lover, with his dark, handsome face and musical voice. She felt instinctively that Daisy would not like him, and she had once heard her own mother speak of him as an adventurer. She met him, not because she liked him, but because she liked the flattery of his love. It was pleasant to sit on the shore while he told her of the time when they should go together to bright, far-off lands, where she would be looked upon as a queen—how he would work for her, toil for her, slave for her until every wish of her heart was gratified.

And when he, loving her with all the strength of his

wild nature, asked her to be his wife, she did not promise at first, but she did not refuse. She wanted time to consider, and as the monotonous weeks passed on and nothing happened, she began to think that marrying Ralph Ashton was the wisest thing she could do. He promised to take her far away from these parts. Whether he believed himself that he could accomplish all he promised to do no one can say; but she believed it because she wished it.

Ralph Ashton was to be pitied. He might have occasionally aided in some smuggling expedition, but in his love for Rita he was sincere and honest. And when, one summer evening, after much pleading, the haughty lips smiled and said, "Yes," genuine tears fell from his eyes.

"I will make you so happy, my darling," he said; "every wish of your heart shall be gratified. You love me, Rita, do you not?"

"Yes," she said, gently, "I love you." But, even as she spoke, her thoughts were busy with the future, and the one haunting question never satisfactorily answered, "Could she have done better?" And while Ralph poured out his love in words that must have touched another heart, she went over again all the old arguments and reasons that had decided her upon accepting him.

It was arranged between them that nothing should be said at present to Mrs. Rivers. The marriage could not take place for the next year and a half. In one month Ralph was going on a voyage—one that would bring in plenty of money; it was not worth while mentioning the engagement until that voyage was over.

"But you will be true to me, Rita?" said he. "Remember, you hold my life and soul in your hands."

"I will be true," she said, calmly.

He was absent after that for three days; but all Rita's misgivings were set at rest on his return. He had brought her a "wedding present," he called it. How much of his hard earnings had been spent on it, he knew best.

They met as usual on the sands, and he put into her hands a small morocco case. Rita opened it, and, with a cry of delight, saw a pair of diamond ear-rings that shone with a light that dazzled her eyes. A diamond ring lay near them, and Ralph placed it on her finger.

“That is our betrothal ring,” he said, “and the time will come when you shall wear as many diamonds as you like. Let me place these ear-drops in your ears.”

The diamonds were not brighter or more full of fire than the dark eyes raised in mute wonder and startled admiration to his face.

“Oh, Ralph!” she said, “how lovely, how costly! I never thought I should have a real diamond of my own.”

She was so pleased, and looked so beautiful in her joy, that Ralph Ashton would gladly have parted with all he had in the world for such a look. The gems had well-nigh emptied his purse; still, he thought not, cared not.

She never gave one thought to any sacrifice he might have made to procure so costly a present for her, or of the love that had actuated him; she only gloried in her own bright, vivid beauty, and how the jewels would increase it.

Ralph Ashton had but another fortnight to remain in England; and one evening, when the tide was out and the sun setting he went to meet Rita on the sands. As the time approached for his departure, something like fear and doubt took possession of his mind.

He began to wonder if Rita would be true to him during his absence. She who loved wealth and longed for grandeur—would she be true if a lover should come with gold and fortune? A fierce half doubt took hold of him and blanched his dark face. For many months they had met on the sands, and he had told her of his love in words that would have burned their way to another heart; but he did not remember that she had ever blushed, or that her proud face had ever softened for him. “He would see her this evening,” he said to himself; “and bind her to him by

a vow so solemn, that she, who feared little, should fear to break it." For two whole days he had not seen her. Mrs. Rivers lay ill, and her daughter could not leave the house; but to-night she had promised to come, and he knew she would keep her word.

CHAPTER V.

THE evening had come, and Ralph Ashton proceeded to the sea-shore to meet the haughty beauty he so passionately loved, and to bind her, if possible, to a vow of constancy from which she should never swerve. The tide was out, and the sun was setting behind a red bank of cloud.

Rita saw her lover approaching; she noted the anxious, depressed look on the face usually so bright and hopeful.

"I had great difficulty in getting away," she said; "my mother is still very far from well; but you wanted me, and I am here. Tell me quickly what it is—my time must be short."

They sat down upon two large stones, and the waves rolled in dreamily, noiselessly at their feet.

"I am not happy, Rita," said he. "I wish I could stay near you, you are so enchanting. Some one is sure to try and steal you from me while I am away."

"There is not much to fear," she replied, with a smile and a sigh.

"Even if it should be so," he continued, "you would be constant to me, would you not, Rita?"

There was not a quiver on the proud lips that said calmly:

"Of course I should, Ralph;" and her eyes, still bent on the waves, never sought his.

"Tell me so in another tone of voice," he cried; "look at me as though you loved me! It is a terrible thing to win the whole of a man's heart, as you have won the whole of mine. It would be dangerous to deceive me, Rita; my

whole life and love lie at your feet. I, who fear nothing—the wildest storm never daunted me—tremble at one word or look of yours. You are my own, and I am yours. Deal gently with me—tell me you love me.”

“You know it, Ralph,” she said, more gently, for the passion of his words alarmed her, but he listened in vain for the true ring in that musical voice—it was not there.

“I try to believe it,” he said; “if I were to doubt it I should go mad. I could not live without you, Rita; the world would be a dreary blank. Were you to die, my darling, I could not survive you. If you deceived me—”

“What should you do?” she asked.

“I would follow you through the wide world,” he said, “and when I found you, as truly as the sun sets, I would kill you, Rita, and thus avenge myself.”

In after-years she remembered his words; in the most terrible hour of her life they came back to her, and she knew he meant what he had said.

“Do not talk in that wild way, Ralph,” she said; “you alarm me.”

In one moment the fierce look had left his face, and he was himself again.

“Forgive me, Rita,” he said, humbly; “the very thought drives me to despair. You will be true to me, will you not, darling? When you are my wife I shall be a good man. I must do something for the kind Heaven that gives me my treasure. It is not only my heart, but my soul, that you hold in your hands. Deal gently with me. I have staked all my life on one throw.”

“When do you go?” she asked. His unusual seriousness dismayed her. She was there to listen to praises, not threats.

“In ten days,” he said, looking almost wistfully in that wondrous face, but no change, no cloud came over it; “and you have promised me, Rita, we shall be married on the first week of my return.”

"I have promised," she said, "and I will keep my word."

He looked over the wide sea, and again to the shining sky.

"Rita," he said, suddenly, "I shall bind you to me by a vow. You are mine before Heaven. Swear to me that you will never care for another, and that until you die you will be faithful to me."

She would have hesitated, but there was a look in his face that compelled her to obedience. The bloom faded from her countenance as she repeated after him words so solemn her whole soul was subdued by their strength.

"There," said Ralph Ashton, releasing her hands, "I am quite satisfied. Neither you nor any other woman breathing dare break such an oath as that."

Long after Ralph Ashton left her Margaret Rivers sat dreaming by the sea—not of the fierce, true love she had won—not of the strong, passionate heart that lay in her hand—not of the soul she might help to save—but of the old, tormenting doubt: "Had she done the best she could?" For the first time that evening she realized what she had done. Ralph Ashton's hold upon her was for life. He would never let her go. Had she done the best she could? True, he made money—he would one day, perhaps, be rich in a certain kind of way—but, after all, he was not a gentleman. He had given her jewels; but common sense and reason forbade her ever to think he could repeat the gift. All the visions and dreams he had won her with seemed unreal now. Over and over again she asked herself if, with her glorious dower of beauty, she had done her best.

No warning came in the mysterious voice of the sea, or in the music of the summer night, to tell her that on this very evening the crisis of her life had begun.

She sat watching the waves until the tide began to roll in more quickly, and the light faded in the western sky.

Then Rita, rousing herself from her dreams, went slowly home. Rooks' Nest is some distance from Queen's Lynne, and the evening had grown dark before she reached home.

All visions were forgotten when she stood once more in her mother's house. Mrs. Rivers had long been ailing. For some days the doctor had been attending her, but did not say she was in any immediate danger. When Rita left her that evening to meet her lover, one of her neighbors offered to sit with her while the young girl was out. This same woman met her now at the door, with a pale, scared face.

"Miss Rita," she cried, "where have you been? Your mother has been taken so ill I thought you would never see her again."

And when Rita stood by her mother's bedside, and saw the fatal change that had come over the kindly, homely face, tears of genuine sorrow filled her eyes.

"Your mother is very ill," said the doctor, gently. "The immediate danger seems to have passed, but she must be carefully watched all night, and if the least change takes place send for me."

There were many offers of assistance, but Rita saw her mother wished to be left alone with her. In her cool, grand way, she bade "good-night" to those who would fain have lingered. She arranged the sick-room, shaded the lamp so that the light should not fall on her mother's face, prepared cooling drinks, and then took her seat by her dying mother's side.

"Rita," said the faint, changed voice, "is it too late to send for Daisy? I want to see her. I shall not live until the sun rises to-morrow. I feel death-cold at my heart, and I must see Daisy before I die."

"I will do my best," said Rita, gently; "but you will not die yet, mother."

"I know, child," said the sick woman. "I can feel

that the end of my life has come. I shall have seen your father again before to-morrow dawns, Rita. A doctor's words signify nothing; they can not know. I feel it, and I must see Daisy."

But midnight had struck before a messenger could be found to go for Daisy. It was a long walk there, and Rita knew the summer morning would dawn before her sister could reach home. She told her mother so; and Susan Rivers, turning her pallid face to the wall, moaned aloud.

"Are we quite alone, Rita?" asked the sick woman, in a low, faint voice.

"Quite alone, mother," said the young girl. The moonbeams peeped in at the window, throwing long lines of silver light on the floor; the deep, solemn hush of the night was unbroken, save by the murmur of the wind and the distant breaking of the waves. Margaret Rivers never forgot that night—its solemn silence and dim light.

"I have a secret, Rita," said the faint voice. "I have held it many years. I must see Daisy before I die, and tell it to her. If she does not come, I must tell it to you; and you must hold it in charge, sacredly, as I have done."

The long night wore on, and Daisy did not come.

"Rita," said the dying woman, "unlock that little box for me, and take out the parcel that lies there."

Rita obeyed; her mother's trembling fingers could not unfasten the string; she opened it—and there lay a ring of pearls, a locket with fair and dark hair intertwined, the initials "M" and "A" in the center; with them lay a packet of letters, written in a fair, delicate hand.

"Those are Daisy's," said Susan; "give them to her. Bend down, Rita—lower still—while I tell you the secret I have kept for fifteen years. Daisy is not my child, Rita; she is not your own sister, as you have always believed her to be."

She paused, for Rita cried out in astonishment.

"Are you dreaming, mother?" she said.

"No," replied Mrs. Rivers; "these things prove my story is no dream. Look in the register at St. John's, in Deepdale; there you will find I have only one child—Margaret, my only daughter. Daisy is no child of mine."

"Who is she?" asked Rita, in utter amazement.

"That is the story I must tell you; and you must repeat every word to her, if—if I do not see her again. I have never spoken to you much of my early life, Rita," continued her mother, "and my silence has been for Daisy's sake. My parents were respectable west-country people, who sent me to school, and did their best for me. When they died, I went out to service. I never had but one place, and that was at Mr. Arle's—a rich merchant who lived in Hampshire. He had one daughter, Miss Margaret Arle; and, although I was but sixteen, the entire charge of her was intrusted to me."

Mrs. Rivvers then proceeded to tell her daughter all the particulars relative to the bankruptcy and death of Miss Arle's father; of the young lady's marriage; and the leaving of her child in her charge, as already unfolded to the reader.

"She was," concluded the mother, "but a little child when we left Deepdale and came to Queen's Lynne. For my dead mistress's sake, I have kept the secret. No one ever dreams that Daisy is other than my own child—no one suspects it. I tell you now, Rita, for I shall see her mother in another world, and she will ask me if I have done my best."

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was silence for some minutes, and Mrs. Rivers's voice had grown faint and exhausted. Rita sat lost in bewildered surprise.

"And what am I to do, mother?" she asked.

"Give these to Daisy," she replied; "this locket and ring, with the letters. Tell her the story I have told you. Tell her I have no clew to her father's name, save that he was called Captain Arthur, and that his regiment was in India in 18—. Perhaps he died there. If ever Daisy wins friends, they will make inquiries for her; but if she finds the marriage was not a legal one, tell her I charge her for her dead mother's sake to let the story die, so that no taint may be upon Margaret Arle's name. You will give her these messages faithfully, Rita? Promise me."

"I will not omit one word," replied her daughter, breathlessly.

"For you," said the dying woman, "I have no fear. This little house will always be your own. You will have money sufficient to support you. Had Heaven so willed it, I should like to have lived long enough to hold your children in my arms. I have been very proud of your beauty, child; but things look so different in the strong light of eternity. I have often thought you proud and vain. Ah, Rita! you will lie some day where I am lying now—remember it is all vanity! Do not fix your heart on the world's honors and riches. Ah, me, that pain! I shall not see Daisy again, kiss her for me, and tell her how well I love her."

Even as she uttered the words an awful, gray pallor settled on her face, and Rita went hastily to summon aid. But no human help could avail for Mrs. Rivers—the fiat had gone forth. The doctor was summoned, friends came, and stood near; the faithful heart was fast nearing its rest. She did not speak again. In the faint morning light, when Daisy came and bent over her, no look of recognition shone in the dim eyes; they were closed to all earthly things.

Before Mrs. Rivers died—before Daisy came home—Rita

gathered the contents of the little parcel together, and placed them carefully in her own box.

"There will be time enough for telling her that strange story," she thought.

And Daisy, all unconscious, knelt by her supposed mother's side. She closed the kind eyes that had always looked tenderly on her, and when she knew that death had claimed his own, she wept bitter tears of sorrow. Yet, as she gazed upon the white, cold face, she felt, in some strange way, it was not part of herself that lay there.

Friends and neighbors comforted the two orphan girls, now left utterly alone. Daisy felt as though her heart would break, and wondered at the strange, dreamy look on Rita's face. There was not much time for weeping, preparations had to be made for the funeral. Poor Mrs. Rivers's only friend in Deepdale, an old widow lady, Mrs. Ferne, took up her abode at the cottage, where mourning dresses and arrangements for the funeral deepened the gloom of the young girls.

Rita said to herself that there was no opportunity of telling Daisy the story until after the funeral. As she watched her adopted sister a feeling of envy crept into her heart. For the first time, she was struck by the difference between Daisy and herself. She noted the air of high-bred refinement; the spiritual expression of the sweet, pure face; the little hands, so white and beautifully formed; the graceful symmetry of the slight, girlish figure. Could it be possible that this girl, whom she had always looked down upon as her younger and inferior sister, might turn out to be the child of a rich and noble father? Either she was that or her very birth was a shame and disgrace. Which could it be?

Her mother had entertained cruel doubts; could they have been just ones? In the dead silence of the night Rita rose and unlocked the box containing her trust. She read Margaret Arle's letters over and over again. Ah! there

could be no doubt, she spoke so proudly of her husband; it had been a real marriage, Rita felt sure, and no mock one. Whoever Captain Arthur might be, Daisy was his legitimate child. What if he were a man of high position as well as good birth? Then Daisy would be a lady—would enter, by right, that gay world Rita thought paradise. She would be rich and happy. Why had fate and fortune favored her? Ah! would that Daisy had been Mrs. Rivers's own child and she the captain's daughter!

Then, with the letters in her hand, she fell into a waking dream. If it had been so, she would never rest until she had discovered him—she would search for him until he was found. Then she would win his love. He would surely be pleased with, and proud of her magnificent beauty. Then all she had longed for would be hers. She saw herself superbly dressed, with gleaming jewels, with lovers sighing around her—with the gay, the great, and the noble all offering her homage. The vain, worldly heart was dazzled with the picture; but the cold reality came and chilled her—all this was for Daisy, and not for herself.

With a deep sigh, she relocked the box, and went back to the little room where Daisy slept. The moon shone brightly; one of its silvery beams touched Daisy's face, lingering almost lovingly on the clear, calm brow and the delicate, spiritual features. Rita bent over her, silently wondering, until wonder became jealous pain, what the future held in store for the sleeping girl. Suddenly, across her face there came a strange expression, as of a wild, deep thought; it lingered there, filling the dark eyes with gloom.

She held out her hands in horror, as though trying to drive it from her, but it would not go.

"Not now," she whispered to herself. "I will not think of it now. I have to kiss my mother's face again."

Yet the thought had a weird fascination for her. She could not sleep, she could not rest; ideas crowded upon

her almost against her will; plans and arrangements suggested themselves to her. Early dawn found Margaret Rivers pale and absorbed.

The sun rose, and the day was the one appointed for Mrs. Rivers's funeral. The two girls went together to the darkened room, where she lay, and took their last farewell of her. Warm tears fell from Daisy's eyes upon the cold form she had always dearly loved; but no tears dimmed the dark eyes that had so strange an expression.

* * * * *

The funeral was over; friends and neighbors had all withdrawn, Mrs. Ferne alone remaining. Daisy was preparing to return to Miss Toffles's on the following morning, and still the secret was not told, the trust was unfulfilled; and the younger girl wondered why the elder one shunned her, and what it was that clouded Rita's face with something deeper than sorrow. She little dreamed of the fierce warfare going on in that vain, passionate heart; she little knew that good and evil were fighting a hard battle; that her own destiny and Rita's hung trembling in the balance.

That night, while Daisy slept, Rita watched and fought the battle that decided the course of her life. For many long hours the battle had raged, and evil was fast triumphing over good.

She had never told the story; for on the night she gazed with jealous envy on Daisy as she lay sleeping, a thought came to her which burned its way into her heart, and would not leave her. Daisy knew nothing of the secret. No one in the wide world knew it but herself. There was no proof except such as she held in her hands. Why not put herself in Daisy's place, and call herself Captain Arthur's daughter? Who would know? The only two who could detect the imposition—Daisy's mother and her own—were both dead.

At first the thought that glanced through her mind

shocked her; it was too base a betrayal of her mother's trust. But gently and subtly it stole back and nestled there a welcome guest.

Still she did not dare, while her mother lay unburied there, to arrange her plans. When she stood, as it were, alone in the world, she made up her mind.

It was a fierce battle; there was something of good in the vain, worldly, ambitious nature, and her better self cried out at the base design; but the good was conquered on that summer night when she stood at the window watching the quiet stars. The temptation was too strong—she yielded—and the great battle was lost.

There seemed no obstacle, not even one difficulty to overcome—thanks to the fate that had called her Margaret, and had given to Daisy the same name. Margaret Rivers was, according to the register, the only child Mrs. Rivers had. There could be no difficulty in that. Every one would readily believe Daisy to be that child. Who could say she was not? Her mother had known few people at Deepdale, and they were never likely to hear of the circumstances again. Possession, in this case, was more than nine points of the law. She had the ring, the locket, the letters, and, above all, the story. She need not alter one word of it. She had but to put herself in Daisy's place. She thought over everything connected with the history of Margaret Arle and her child, and could not find one weak point.

"After all," she said to herself, as the voice of conscience tried to make itself heard, "what does it matter? If ever Captain Arthur comes to light, he will find a daughter to be proud of, and I shall make a better lady than Daisy ever could. To deprive him of a child would be very different; to substitute one grown-up girl for another can not matter much."

It was after midnight when Rita went to Daisy, and calling her gently, roused her from sleep. The young maiden

opened her eyes in wonder, and Rita shrunk from the pure, clear glance.

“Do not be angry, Daisy; I could not help waking you. You are going back to-morrow, and I want to tell you something before you return.”

Daisy looked up in some surprise.

“What is it, dear?” she asked, gently. “Are you in trouble, or have you a secret?”

Rita flushed as she exclaimed hoarsely:

“It is a secret; one that concerns myself.”

CHAPTER VII.

“A SECRET?” said Daisy, raising her clear, truthful eyes to Rita’s face. “I did not think we had one in our home!”

“It is a secret,” continued the elder girl, “that the world would never suspect. I, the one concerned, never dreamed of it. Daisy, can you believe that I was not Mrs. Rivers’s own child?”

“Not our mother’s own child?” said Daisy, incredulously. “It is impossible—it can not be true!”

“It is a fact,” said Rita. “The night before my poor nurse died she sent every one away from the room and told me the story.”

“Who are you, then?” cried Daisy. “Why, Rita, I can not believe it! You must be my own sister—you are dreaming!”

“Nay, it is no dream,” said Rita. “See, here are the proofs. Yet I shall always be your sister and love you very much. I shall always do my best for you.”

The faint inflection of patronage in the rich, musical tones was not lost upon Daisy. Something like pain flitted over her features and shadowed the tender eyes.

“Tell me all about it, Rita,” she said, imploringly. “How can it be? Why, my mother always seemed to love you better than me!”

"No," said Rita, in alarm, "that could not be. Did it never strike you how much more anxious she seemed over your education than over mine? There is little to tell; the story is a very simple one. Your mother, when quite a young girl, was my mother's nurse. It seems that my mother's parents were once very rich people, but lost all they had. Her father died, and she herself, after receiving an excellent training, went out as governess. The place where she went was called Hurst Hall, I believe. While there, some gentleman fell in love with her and married her. But, Daisy, the marriage was a secret one. He was brought up by rich, aristocratic relations, who would not hear of such a thing; so he married my mother, Margaret Arle, unknown to every one."

"But who was he?" interrupted Daisy.

"Ah! would that I could tell you!" was the calm reply. "My mother trusted yours, but she never told her that. All she said of my father was, that he was an officer in the army. She called him 'Captain Arthur.' Captain Arthur went to India, leaving my mother in England. But he had a serious illness there; he sent, imploring my mother to go out to him. The doctor said the journey would cost my life. My poor mother, therefore, resolved to leave me behind in her old nurse's care. She took me to Deepdale, our old home, and left me in your mother's charge."

"How strange!" said Daisy; "it seems like a romance or a fairy tale."

"The strangest part has to come," continued Rita. "My mother went in a ship called the 'Ocean Queen;' it was lost at sea; and from the day she left me until the present time no word has ever been heard of or from any friend or relation—no one seems to be aware of my existence. My father has never written—has never claimed me; either he is dead, or he does not know where I am. I shall never believe that he has left me here, and willfully

abandoned me. Your mother told me all this on the night she died; she gave me the locket, the ring, and the letters. How strange it is, Daisy! I do not even know my own name. My mother called herself 'Howard.' I shall take that name. I am 'Margaret Howard;' but I never mean to rest until I have found my father or his relations."

"Then we shall be parted?" said Daisy, sadly.

"That does not follow. When I find noble and wealthy relations I shall not forget you, Daisy."

No thought of wrong, no suspicion that the artfully told story was a false one, came to the pure-minded Daisy; nothing warned her the story she heard with wonder was her own; that her rightful place was usurped by one who had no right to it; that her name, her parents, her identity even, was stolen from her by the proud, ambitious girl she had loved as her own sister.

They talked until the gray dawn of morning stole into the little room; Daisy innocently suggesting plans by which Rita could discover her father's name; Rita wrapped in glowing dreams of what the future might bring for her.

Daisy returned on the morning following to school. Rita remained at the cottage with old Mrs. Ferne. She had decided upon certain plans, but did not intend to carry them out until Ralph Ashton had left the country.

He was the one dark spot in the bright future. Already she had thrown off her allegiance to him in her own mind: she had freed herself from a promise that, with her new prospects, was simply hateful to her. If all went as she dreamed and hoped, high-born gentlemen would sue for her hand. With her glorious dower of beauty, with wealth and position, it would be folly, she said to herself, to think of marrying a man like Ralph. She gave no thought to his strong, passionate love—of the life she held in her hands; but no word of all this did she say to her lover when he came to bid her farewell.

On that evening, as far as human influence went, Rita's destiny was settled. There was no longer any need for meeting her lover clandestinely. She told him to call at the cottage, and say "good-bye" to her there. When he stood at the door, and Mrs. Ferne wondered who it was, Rita, in her calm, grand way, said:

"It is an old friend, going to sea, and he has called to say good-bye."

She went out to him in the little garden, where the June roses were blooming, and the tall, white lilies showed their golden hearts.

Ralph Ashton never forgot that scene in the quiet evening gloaming; he never forgot the expression on that proud, beautiful face, as he spoke in words so passionate they seemed to thrill the quiet evening air. He held her hands in his strong grasp, and made her again take the oath that he believed would bind her to him forever; and, under the light of the evening sky, she uttered the words that for her had ceased to have any meaning; she made the vow with her lips that in her heart she intended to break. Not one word did she say to Ralph Ashton of the story told by Mrs. Rivers, or of her own version of it. When he returned in three years' time, he would hear that she had left Rooks' Nest, and she did not intend or mean him to trace her. She believed he would forget her, or give up all pursuit of her as hopeless. Even should he discover her, she thought the change in her position would awe him and convince him of the impassable barrier between them.

There was no change on the calm, proud face upraised to her own, as the young sailor spoke those words that would have touched another heart. While he spoke of their future, the happiness in store for them, of his passionate love and devotion, she was thinking and hoping they would never stand side by side again.

She dare not utter one of the thoughts that filled her

mind; the dark, handsome face that gazed so lovingly into her own could have worn a look that would have terrified her. She was brave enough, but she dare not rouse Ralph Ashton to passion or anger. She felt, as they stood there, that he was her master—she dare not defy, but she might elude him.

“In three years!” Ralph said. “Oh, Rita, how shall I live through them? There will be no one moment in which I shall not think of you, and long for the sound of your voice, or one glimpse of your face. In three years I shall find you when the flowers are blooming just as they bloom now; and no sun will be so bright to me as the smile you will welcome me with, when I come to claim you.”

If Ralph Ashton could have foreseen how and where he would find her, he would have died before the blow came. To the last hour of his life he remembered every detail of that scene: the distant chiming of the waves, the musical voice that whispered false words, the magical charms of the girl he loved, the fragrance of the roses, and the mellow evening light.

The gloaming passed, and the gray tints of night grew deeper.

“Let me sit with you one hour longer, Rita,” pleaded Ralph; and she asked him into the cottage.

“You must give me a keepsake,” he said, when Mrs. Ferne plainly hinted that it was growing late; “anything that you have touched and cared for yourself.”

“Give him something that will do him good, Rita,” said the old woman. “He is a young man, and he is going down into the deep seas. It will do him no harm to remember who keeps him safe in the midst of dangers.”

Ralph smiled at the words, but she continued earnestly: “You have two Bibles, Rita. One, there, your poor mother used every day. There is another lying on the shelf there—give him that.”

Rita silently took the book from the upper shelf, where it

had lain for many long years, and placed it in Ralph's hand.

"Read it when you are on the seas," she said, gravely.

He took it from her without a word of comment. She was all unconscious that, at Deepdale, Mrs. Rivers had placed little Daisy's portrait and her mother's last letter there—the letter which spoke of the child's golden curls, and directed again that she should be called Daisy; all unconscious that between the leaves lay the portrait of a fair, graceful child, while underneath it, in her mother's own handwriting, were the two words, "Daisy Howard."

In the strongest armor there is generally one weak point. Rita had made good her story, serenely unconscious of the only piece of evidence that could ever betray her, and that evidence she had placed in the hands of the man she intended to dupe and elude.

Ralph thought little of the gift. He would have preferred the ribbon she wore in her hair, or the flower that she carried in her hands. He took the book home with him, and laid it in his sea-chest. He was many miles away from old England when he saw it again, and found what it contained.

Even that vain, ambitious heart was touched with his sorrow when the time came for him to leave her. He clasped her in his arms, and kissed the face that lured him on to ruin and death. Tears dimmed the eyes that had seldom wept before. For long hours after he had quitted her his warm kisses seemed to burn her lips and brows. She was touched at his sorrow, wondered at the depth of his love, but never dreamed of being true to him. When his tall figure disappeared down the high-road she felt released. He had faded from her life, she thought, and would trouble her no more.

Two days afterward, Daisy came home with strange intelligence. One of the pupils at Miss Toffles's academy—the daughter and heiress of John Denham, of Landsmeer

—was going abroad, and nothing would satisfy her but taking with her, as companion, the fair, gentle girl whom every one loved. Mrs. Denham came over to Queen's Lynne, and urgently pressed Daisy to accede to her daughter's wish. Daisy had no objection; her only difficulty was in leaving Rita. The change from the dull school-room to such a life of gayety and pleasure as Laura Denham mapped out, was delightful enough. She liked Mrs. Denham's high-bred, graceful manner, so different to the starched propriety of Miss Toffles; she asked Mrs. Denham to wait a few days for her decision, as all must depend upon Rita.

Far from opposing the plan, Rita thought it the best event that could have happened. Daisy, at home, might have been in her way; but Daisy, abroad, could not interfere with her arrangements. By all means, let her go.

"It would be folly to remain here for my sake," said Rita. "I shall not be here long myself. In a few more weeks I intend to take some active steps for discovering my father's name and whereabouts. If I find him, this will be no home for me."

"I shall always love it," said Daisy, gently.

"Quite right," replied Rita. "It is your own; but it is not mine."

The younger girl said nothing; she felt pained and wounded. Already there seemed to be a boundless difference between them. Rita assumed a haughty, patronizing manner that grieved the other's tender, sensitive heart.

In less than two months after Mrs. Rivers's death, Daisy had left England, and Rita was wondering what should be her first step. Ralph was far on his voyage, and the only proof of the identity of Captain Arthur's daughter was with him.

Daisy was happy. The Denhams intended remaining on the Continent for three years, and during that time she was to be the friend and companion of their only child.

The June roses were blooming when Ralph Ashton bade farewell to the girl he loved so deeply and dearly. She began then to arrange her plans; but before the roses had faded, fate had taken the threads into her own hand. There was no need for the beautiful, ambitious girl to scheme and arrange; the father whom she intended to seek was seeking her, and the tragedy of her life began.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Lisles, of Lisle Court, stood foremost in the ranks of English nobility. They had served their country well, both in senate and on the battle-field. Time had been when the English Court had no greater favorites than the lords of Lisle. Far back as the reign of Stephen, one found their name in the annals of history—a Lisle fought for Matilda, and never quite yielded allegiance to King Stephen. A Lisle joined the Crusades, and was well loved by the lion-hearted king. Huldebrand Lisle fell at Bannockburn, and Bertram helped to win the victory of Poitiers. Vyviene died on Flodden Field, and Hubert figured as one of Henry the Eighth's best counselors. The doomed race of the Royal Stuarts had no truer friends than the Lisles, of Lisle Court. The bed-chamber where "Bonnie Prince Charlie" slept remains untouched. When the last Stuart ceased to reign, their interest in public life seemed to end. Lord Archibald Lisle, during the reign of George the Second, gave up his seat in Parliament, and devoted himself to the care of his estate. In all England there stands no fairer domain than Lisle Court. It lies in the fertile midland counties—in the quiet, green heart of the land. Wide streams flow through it; dark, belted woods shade and shelter it; rich meadows and golden corn fields surround it. In the far distance, Glenn Forest gives to the calm scenery the picturesque aspect not common in old England.

The Hall itself is a grand old building, comprising every style of architecture in vogue since the reign of Stephen—gable-ends, deep oriel windows, towers, and turrets. The broad portico still stands where Lord Douglas Lisle knelt, with his fair young wife, to welcome the “Merrie Monarch.” Ancient and modern time seem strangely mingled at Lisle Court.

Cheerful, modern rooms, with long French windows, look over the garden, where tall fountains play among fragrant flowers. Every modern luxury is there, every late improvement, every new design that can add either to pleasure, luxury, or comfort. One also sees state-rooms, untouched since royal faces smiled there.

In the long picture-gallery hang portraits of all the lords of Lisle—not one is missing. Fair-faced, haughty dames are there also. Sybilla Lisle, whose sweet, modest grace, and tender, spiritual face charmed the “Merrie Monarch,” is by the side of her loyal husband.

Lord Ronald Lisle, the last baron, married young; he had two sons, bright, handsome boys, and then his wife died. He loved her memory too well ever to take a second wife. From the time of her death, he devoted himself to his children. He was a proud, fastidious man—proud to excess of his name and lineage, honestly believing the Lisles second to none. The bare idea of a *mésalliance* was hateful to him. Poor relations he considered one of the greatest afflictions that could befall any family. When his sister married Lionel Wyverne, the younger son of a poor baronet, his anger knew no bounds. Lionel Wyverne, whose only fortune consisted in a handsome, aristocratic face and some two hundred per annum, struggled for a few years with poverty and a delicate wife; he died then, tired of the world and its coldness. Lord Lisle had no resource save to fetch his sister and her only child, Arthur, to Lisle Court. He adopted his nephew, treating him in every respect as one of his own children. He educated him with

his sons; and when his college career ended, purchased for him a commission in a "crack" regiment. When Captain Arthur Wyverne came to his uncle, and told him he had fallen in love with, and wanted to marry a pretty, penniless governess, Lord Lisle laughed in contemptuous anger. He was deaf to the young man's pleading and earnest supplication. He grew white with anger when Captain Wyverne persisted, and declared his inviolable resolution to marry Margaret Arle. Lord Lisle asked him if he knew at what cost.

"Not only," he said, "will I refuse to see you again, and withdraw from you all countenance and support, but your mother, too, must suffer for you. If you persist in this absurd folly, she must leave Lisle Court, and you know what suffering that would inflict upon her. Let me hear no more of it, Arthur; boyish fancies are soon forgotten."

Captain Wyverne paused then. For himself, he could have endured anything; but the thought of his delicate mother, sent adrift from the home she valued so much, where every luxury was at her command, quelled him. She had suffered enough; for no love or fancy could he give her what he believed would be a death-blow.

He said no more to Lord Lisle. After some weeks of anxious debate, he compromised the matter by a private marriage, as already detailed.

Captain Wyverne was the more tenacious over his secret, as his mother, to whom Lord Lisle repeated the whole conversation daily, almost hourly, implored of him never to offend his uncle.

"It would kill me, Arthur," she said, "to leave Lisle Court now! I have grown accustomed to luxury! I could never renew the old struggle with genteel poverty and limited means."

Then he looked upon her pale, delicate face. He knew she spoke truly; so Captain Wyverne guarded his secret as

he guarded his life. He impressed the importance of secrecy so strongly upon his wife, that, as we have seen, even to the nurse she intrusted with her child, she never breathed his name.

One brief year, as the reader is aware, and then a dark cloud fell over the happy home. Captain Wyverne's regiment was ordered to India, and neither wife nor child was strong enough to accompany him.

He never forgot the agony of that parting hour, how his wife clung round him, the warm tears falling on his face. He never forgot the parting words, in which she told him how dearly she loved him, and thanked him for his kindness and his love. He wept, as men seldom weep, when he kissed, for the last time, the fair, sweet face he was never to see again.

Margaret laid the little one in his arms. He could not see down the long vista of years. He never dreamed that the cold, cruel sea would hide from him forever the loving wife whose kisses and tears were warm upon his face. He could not foresee how treachery, ambition, and vanity would, for long years, make the little daughter he loved a stranger to him.

Then came his illness, and his urgent request that his wife would join him in far-off India. How anxiously he awaited her arrival, may be well imagined. But, instead, there came to him, on his sick-bed, the fatal tidings. The vessel was lost, and all on board had perished with her.

In after years, he never knew how he had lived through the misery of that time. At first he hoped that something might have prevented his wife from going in the doomed ship. But in the printed list of the dead, he saw her name, "Margaret Howard." The papers mentioned her as a beautiful young lady, going to join her husband in India. There could be no doubt about it; she was lost, and the tender face he had longed to see would never smile on him again.

For many long weeks Captain Wyverne forgot his sorrow in insensibility. When health and reason returned, his first thought was of his child—Margaret's child. What had become of her? The little one had evidently been left behind, for there was no mention of her in the passengers' list. With whom had she been left? How should he find her? During the long, weary hours of convalescence, the young officer lay pondering these questions. Surely, in England, there must be some clew. Some one there must know the whereabouts of Margaret's child. He wrote to Mrs. Markham, in whose house his wife had lodged, but the letter was never answered.

He could not recover; his mind and heart were both tortured. At length, he succeeded in obtaining a few months' leave of absence, and returned home.

His mother, when she gazed upon his face, did not know her own son. The white, haggard features and dim, saddened eyes told of more than physical suffering.

Once more in England, he commenced a life-long search for his lost child. How could he best find out to whom Margaret had intrusted her?

On the first day of his return, he went to the house where she had lodged. Then he found out Mrs. Markham had gone to America; but no one could tell him where, or to what part of that vast country. One of the neighbors, who remembered the lady and the child, told him they both left the house a week before Mrs. Markham went away; so that, evidently, the child had not been left with her. By dint of great expense and trouble in advertising, the cabman was found who had driven the lady and the little one to the station. He remembered every detail, but he could not say where she was going; he had not remarked the direction upon the box. It seemed to Captain Wyverne that every trace of little Margaret was lost.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN WYVERNE did not search alone for his lost child; he employed the keenest, cleverest detective in England to assist; he advertised in all the papers, briefly stating the circumstances, and offering a handsome reward for any one who could tell him where the child had been placed. But a silence like the cold, long silence of death seemed to have fallen over little Margaret. Mrs. Rivers, in her quiet home at Deepdale, never saw any papers; not one of the many advertisements ever came under her notice.

Driven almost to despair, Captain Wyverne told the secret to his terrified mother. Her wonder and astonishment were great; she quite believed, poor lady, that her son had forgotten his "foolish love affair," and now, he told her, not only had he been married and lost his beautiful young wife, but he was over in England purposely to find the child so strangely lost.

Her first cry was one of earnest supplication that he would keep the secret from Lord Lisle.

"Of course I shall, mother," he replied. "Would to Heaven I had told him before, and had taken my darling with me! It is I who have murdered her by my cowardice and cruelty in hurrying her over to India. There is no use telling my uncle now. Have no fear, mother; help me to find my child."

But Mrs. Wyverne could suggest nothing.

"Margaret," she said, "must have left the child with some one," but she could not tell how that some one was to be discovered. Strange to say, she had read some of the advertisements, and had wondered who it was that so earnestly sought a lost child. The name, Margaret Howard, was new to her; least of all did she dream that the poor lady lost in the "Ocean Queen" was her son's wife.

All over England the advertisements were read, and many comments were made upon them. They told so pathetic a story that many were anxious to join in the search for the child.

“A lady—Mrs. Margaret Howard, of 11 Linden Street, Regent’s Park—sailed in the ‘Ocean Queen,’ to join her husband, who was then dangerously ill, in India. Before leaving she placed a little girl out to nurse; the father is now in England, anxiously seeking information as to the child’s whereabouts, as its mother was lost at sea, and no clew, even, can be found of the person who has charge of it.”

In many a happy English home this advertisement was read; the dates were carefully inserted, but no reply ever came. The six months’ leave of absence ended, and Captain Wyverne returned to India, broken-hearted at the loss of his child.

He did not abandon the search; every year he sent remittances to the detective, who had the business in hand; his mother, too, promised to do her best.

Twelve years passed, and never once during the course of them did one iota of intelligence gladden his heart.

He grew at length to believe that she was dead.

Life had no pleasures for him. He never ceased to mourn for the loving, gentle wife who slept beneath the waves—he never ceased to reproach himself for having sent for her. By so doing, he had lost both his treasures. He thought of her unceasingly, picturing to himself how she looked; what she would be like if she still lived; had she Margaret’s sweet face and soft, dark hair.

At length a change came in his fortunes. An accident happened that created a sensation in the great world. Lord Lisle and his two sons, who had gone on the Continent together, were drowned in the Lake of Como. No one knew exactly how the accident had happened. There

had been a sudden gust of wind—a sudden upheaving of the deep, blue waters. Those who waited for them on shore saw the gentlemen struggle for some time with the waves. The boatmen saved themselves, but the English “milords,” none of them good swimmers, sunk, and were lost in spite of all the efforts made to save them.

It was more than a nine-days' wonder. People could not forget it. The father, still a handsome man, in the prime of life, lost with his sons, two fine, promising young men! The tragedy seemed, for a few days, to spread a gloom through all England.

The papers were loud in praise of the deceased nobleman. The title and estate devolved, they said, upon Captain Arthur Wyverne, now serving in India. He, the nephew, and next of kin to the dead lord, was his heir at law.

The news came to him, but it brought nothing but sadness. He had loved the bright, gay-hearted cousins, with whom his childhood had been spent. He felt a grateful liking for Lord Lisle, despite the one great quarrel and its consequences. He would far rather they had lived, and he remained Captain Wyverne. His interest in all that concerned the world seemed dead. He might have returned to England years ago, but he did not care to do so. He might have gained position and rank, but he cared nothing for them—all energy and hope seemed to have died in him.

But whether he liked it or not, Lord Lisle was obliged to hasten home. He had many painful duties to perform. He went to Italy himself and superintended the removal of the three bodies to England. The whole country-side were present at the magnificent funeral he arranged. He complied with every injunction found in his uncle's will—that will which mentioned so proudly and lovingly the two brave sons who now slept with him. Legacies were paid to old servants and dear friends. All this was done before

Lord Lisle paused and realized to himself the great change in his life.

The first question he asked them startled the lawyers: "Who was his heir?—for he never intended marrying."

They told him Philip Lisle, a second cousin of the late lord—a young man still at Oxford.

Lord Lisle desired that he should come to Lisle Court at once. He wished him for the future to reside there.

"But, my dear Arthur," remonstrated Mrs. Wyverne, now the proud, happy mistress of the Court, "you are young still. You will surely marry. There are many fair and noble ladies in England who would gladly call themselves Lady Lisle."

"I shall never marry, mother," he replied, with a grave smile, "my heart and my love lie buried with Margaret. I died with her in one sense. Life has been all dark to me since."

"You should try to forget that dismal story," said his mother, anxiously. "Something is due to your rank in life; something is due to me. Am I never to hold a child of yours in my arms or know the happiness of loving your wife?"

"Hush, mother," he said, gently; "you torture me. My wife is sleeping where the restless waves chant her requiem. My child is lost. Oh, if it should please Heaven that I may one day find her, I shall live again."

She opposed his wish no longer, and Philip Lisle, the heir of Lisle Court, came to dwell with his kinsman.

He was a bright, handsome youth, with a clear, true Saxon face and fair hair, honest, laughing eyes, and a smile of singular sweetness. His disposition was charming and open as his face. Loyal and true, honorable and chivalrous, he detested all things false and mean; he would have preferred death to dishonor, torture to disgrace.

Lord Lisle soon loved his young kinsman. He trusted

him, relied upon him, and, above all, he liked telling Philip the story of his "two pearls."

It seemed to him impossible that Lord Lisle's daughter should be lost, and the unhappy father loved the very sound of the young voice that prophesied he would one day see his child again. By Philip's advice the advertisements were resumed, the reward was doubled, and something like hope woke once more in Lord Lisle's heart.

* * * * *

One morning in May, as Philip Lisle stood debating whether he should ride or walk over to Rushton Hall, the old butler came hurriedly up to him.

"Lord Lisle wishes to see you at once, sir," said the old man. "He is in the library, and begged you would not lose a moment."

Philip turned hastily away. At the door of the library he stood for some few seconds lost in wonder at the scene. Lord Lisle lay back in his chair, white and trembling; Mrs. Wyverne stood near him, a look of great excitement on her face and tears shining in her eyes. A strange man, with a clever, shrewd countenance, whom Philip had never seen before, ceased speaking as he entered the room.

"My dear uncle," cried Philip—who invariably addressed Lord Lisle by that title—"what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Philip," said Lord Lisle, earnestly, with quivering lips, "thank God for me! My daughter is found!"

"Found!" cried the young man. "Is it possible?"

"We have traced her," said the stranger. "We know now where she was left. We can not say if she is still there."

"This is Mr. Braye, the detective officer," said Lord Lisle, turning to Philip. "Tell Mr. Lisle all you have told me," he added, to him.

"It is not much, sir," said the man; "but little as it is, it means that Miss Lisle is found. Last week a woman

waited upon me, saying she had read the advertisement and could give the information required. Her name is Mrs. Markham. Seventeen years ago she lived at No. 11 Linden Street, Regent's Park. Apartments in her house were engaged by a gentleman calling himself Mr. Howard, who was going to India, and leaving his wife and child in London. Mrs. Howard remained with her until urgent letters from India summoned her to join her husband. Mrs. Howard begged her—Mrs. Markham—to undertake the charge of her little girl during her absence. She was obliged to decline, as all arrangements had been made for her to join her brother in America. Mrs. Howard then resolved to leave the little one with some woman who had been her own nurse, and the name of the woman was Susan Rivers. She lived at Deepdale, in Devonshire. Mrs. Markham with her own hands wrote the address on the box containing the child's clothes. Mrs. Howard left her house and took the child to Deepdale.

“I told the woman to come again in a week's time. I wished to spare Lord Lisle the pain of suspense. By that night's mail I started for Deepdale. It is a little place, quite out of the world, looking as though it had been asleep for many years—quiet, calm, and unknown. There I made all possible inquiries, and found that Susan Rivers had lived in Rosemary Cottage; that she had two children, called Daisy and Margaret, one of whom was her own child; the other is supposed to have been what the village people call a ‘nurse child.’ Many years ago this same Susan Rivers left Deepdale and went to a place called Queen's Lynne, in Norfolk. She may be living there now.”

“I always guessed it would be so, uncle,” cried Philip. “People can not lose each other long in a small country like England. What is to be done next?”

“The woman, Mrs. Markham, is here, my lord,” said the detective. “She only returned from America three

weeks since, and applied to me at once when she saw the advertisement."

"I will see her now," said Lord Lisle; "let her come in."

A deadly pallor came over his grave, patient face when he saw her. It seemed to him something like receiving a message from his lost wife. The woman greeted him respectfully, but some minutes passed before he could speak to her.

At Lord Lisle's wish they all withdrew, leaving him alone with Mrs. Markham. He wanted to ask a thousand questions about those few last months when his "two pearls" had lived without him; he wanted every detail of those last hours when Margaret parted with the little child she loved so dearly for his sake.

As he listened the present faded from him. He stood once more with his wife's loving arms clasped round his neck; her sweet face, wet with tears, raised to his. It was no shame to his manhood that when the woman had told all she knew he laid his face upon his hands and wept bitterly.

"I remember so well," continued Mrs. Markham, "that the poor young lady told me there was no time and no need for writing to you, my lord; that when she saw you she could tell you all about Nurse Rivers. Of course she could not foresee what was to happen. She had no thought of finding her death in the cold seas."

"If I recover my child, Mrs. Markham," said Lord Lisle, "I will make you a rich woman for life."

"What is to be done next, uncle?" asked Philip, as he re-entered the library.

"You must start for Queen's Lynne at once," said Lord Lisle. "I can not go, Philip, my nerves are all unstrung. Take Mr. Braye with you, and— Stay, our family lawyer should go, too. Send at once for Mr. Kent.

If all goes well, let me know soon; if there should be another disappointment it would kill me."

That same evening three gentlemen started for Queen's Lynne, and his mother, who remained with Lord Lisle, almost feared for his reason, his suspense and anxiety were so great.

"I have often wished for oblivion before," he said. "I wish for it again. "Oh, mother, would to Heaven I could sleep until my eyes opened to see Margaret's child!"

CHAPTER X.

It was the close of a warm summer's afternoon when the three gentlemen reached Queen's Lynne. They had talked during the whole of their journey of the strange circumstances under which Lord Lisle's daughter had for so many years been lost.

The lawyer, Mr. Kent, told of another case he had known wherein the circumstances were somewhat similar, and the loss of the young heiress during many years led to a lawsuit that even yet was not ended.

Philip Lisle listened and replied, but his thoughts were with the unknown cousin they were going to seek. What would she be like? For Lord Lisle's sake he hoped she would resemble the dead wife he mourned so deeply. If she should be vulgar or uneducated, what would his uncle do? Lord Lisle himself was one of the best bred and most refined men in England. How could he tolerate a coarse, vulgar girl always near him?

Philip Lisle had a warm and sincere affection for the kinsman who had acted so liberally toward him. He had grown intensely interested in the tragic love story that had thrown so deep a shadow over Lord Lisle's life. He felt nervous and uneasy as they drew near the end of their journey; a hundred misgivings seized him. He would rather return to Lord Lisle and tell him his daughter lay

dead than take back with him some coarse, vulgar girl, who would be a constant source of pain and sorrow to all connected with her.

When the train stopped at Queen's Lynne his companions saw that Philip Lisle's handsome face had grown pale; he was silent and thoughtful, feeling more nervous than he had ever done in his life.

Their first enterprise was to secure a good dinner at the Albion Hotel, after which the three gentlemen started together in quest of the woman who had charge of Lord Lisle's daughter.

For a long time they were unsuccessful. The name of Susan Rivers did not appear to be known at all, and a shade of uneasiness passed over the detective's face. An inquiry at the post-office reassured them; Susan Rivers had lived at a place called Rooks' Nest. She was dead and buried, but her daughter still lived at the cottage.

They walked in silence to the place, each one thinking more of the anxious father at home than of the young girl they were going to see.

Philip Lisle never forgot that night—the splendor of the evening sky—the fragrance of the purple heather—the distant sighing of the waves, and the solemn quiet of the summer night. The sunbeams still played over the sea. Suddenly turning a corner of the road, they saw before them a pretty cottage, surrounded by a fair and pleasant flower garden.

“This is Rooks' Nest,” said Mr. Kent to Philip Lisle.

“I suppose so,” he replied. “The misery or happiness of Lord Lisle's life depends on what we find here.”

The three gentlemen looked agitated as they stood awaiting the opening of the door. In answer to their summons an elderly woman appeared, who dropped a deep courtesy and looked in much wonder at the unusual number of visitors.

Mr. Kent, stepping forward, took upon himself the office of spokesman.

"We are here for the purpose of making inquiries," he said. "We have been told that Susan Rivers, whom we came to see, is dead, but that her daughter lives here still. Can we see her?"

With confused wonder the old lady admitted the gentlemen and opened the door of the best parlor.

"It'll be Rita you're wanting to see," she said.

But before there was time for any reply what they thought a vision came into the room—a tall, beautiful girl, with a magnificent face and queenly figure—a face so wondrous in its dark, proud beauty that those who saw it never forgot it. Philip Lisle's heart almost stood still. Ah, dear Heaven! could it be—was this Lord Lisle's lost darling?

The moment had come—the moment for which Rita had longed and waited. She met it bravely. The color faded from her cheek and lips, but no word or sign betrayed her fear and suspense.

With one graceful gesture she waved Mrs. Ferne from the room; then, closing the door, she stood facing the three, whose errand she had divined.

"May I ask," said Mr. Kent, "if you are the daughter of the poor woman so lately dead, Susan Rivers?"

There was no faltering of the musical voice; the beautiful lips were not blistered by the cruel lie that rippled over them.

"No," she said, clearly; "I am not the daughter of Susan Rivers—she was my nurse."

Philip Lisle made one step toward her, but the lawyer impatiently signed him to be silent.

"May I ask who it is we have the pleasure of addressing?" he continued.

"Would that I could answer you," she said. "I have no other name than the one my mother poor bore—Margaret.

Until six weeks since, when Susan Rivers died, I believed myself to be what every one thought me—her own child. On the night of her death she told me my true story, and gave me the proofs. I intend to devote my life to one purpose of finding the father who has ceased to remember me.”

“We are here making inquiries that relate doubtless to the same story,” said Mr. Kent. “Will you repeat Susan Rivers’ words to us and show us the proofs?”

She went to a box that lay upon the little table and took from it a key.

“I will return in one minute,” she said, quitting the room.

When she closed the door the three gentlemen looked at one another in stupefied wonder.

“She is beautiful and dignified,” said Philip Lisle. “My uncle will be wild with delight.”

“Do not judge too quickly,” said the detective; “let us hear first what the young lady has to say.”

No trained actress could have played her part better than the young girl who re-entered the room holding a small parcel in her hand. Philip Lisle placed a chair before her. She took it with graceful nonchalance, never once raising her magnificent eyes to his face.

“The story I have to tell is a short one,” she said. “I know my mother only by the name of Margaret Howard. Years ago, when she was Miss Arle, Susan Rivers waited upon her. Her father lost his fortune, and my mother became a governess. Of the particulars of her private marriage with my father I know nothing. My nurse and foster-mother told me that she did not know my father’s name, and had no clew to it, save that he was called Captain Arthur, and went with his regiment to India.

“My mother took me when I was quite a child to Deepdale. She was going to India. My father lay ill there;

and Nurse Rivers promised to take charge of me for a certain time and bring me up with her own child."

The clear voice faltered then, and the beautiful lips trembled.

"My mother was lost at sea," she continued, sadly, "and from that day to this no word has been heard of father or friend. I have been neglected or forgotten. My poor nurse did her best for me, and she never told me until the night she died."

"And then?" continued Mr. Kent, for the plaintive voice ceased.

"Then she gave me these proofs," said the young girl—"the letter my mother wrote, a ring Captain Arthur gave her, and a locket containing the hair of both my parents."

She took the ring and the letter from the box as she spoke, and Philip Lisle looked attentively at them. The lawyer read the letters through in silence. What doubt could he reasonably entertain?

"Why did your nurse never tell you this before?" he inquired. "Her silence seems strange."

"Strange and cruel," said the young girl; "yet she meant it kindly. She thought it better to let me live in happy ignorance. Another reason was, that in her heart, I believe, she distrusted Captain Arthur."

"Why?" said Philip Lisle, hastily.

Then, for the first time, she raised her dark, lustrous eyes to his; their beauty struck him with wonder.

"Because he left me alone, neglected, and uncared for; because, neither by word, letter nor message has he ever sought me. My father left me to live or die as I might."

There was a ring of passion in her voice as she spoke.

"Hush, child!" said Mr. Kent; "your father has spent a life-time in searching for you! He has spent a fortune in the search for eighteen years! The loss of his child has clouded and darkened his life! His hair is white with sor-

row, and all for you! You spoke in ignorance. As you value heaven, never utter one word against your father!"

She grew very pale as he spoke; and Philip Lisle saw a strange quiver pass over her countenance.

"My father?" she said, softly. "Is it possible that he remembers me and loves me?"

"You have to hear his story," continued Mr. Kent. "No one has spoken to you of the chivalrous love he had for the friendless girl he married—of the life-long agony her death and your loss has been!"

"But tell me," she cried, "who he is. Remember, my father is nothing to me but an empty name."

Mr. Kent looked anxiously at his *confrères*.

"There can be no doubt," he said. "I can see no flaw in this evidence."

"No," said the detective officer, gravely; "there is no doubt."

"Then," said Mr. Kent, "the words must not come from a stranger's lips. Mr. Lisle, will you tell this young lady who her father is?"

Philip came forward. He took the trembling hands in his own, and bent over the beautiful, drooping figure.

"When your father married your mother, Margaret Arle," he said, gently, "he was Captain Arthur Wyverne, a brave officer, and a noble gentleman. He is now Lord Lisle, of Lisle Court, and you are his only child."

Lord Lisle! Ah! the stake was worth playing for. Her wildest dreams had not been brighter than this. A thrill of grateful vanity made the worldly, ambitious heart beat more quickly.

"I thank God," said Philip, solemnly, "that you are found at last. Your father has wearied for you; I left him half dead with suspense. He will never recover until he sees you."

For one moment her strong nerve gave way, and she wept convulsively. The strain had been great; she had

repeated her little story—rehearsed it over and over again—and a half doubt had lingered in her mind as to whether it were plausible. She knew that sooner or later the keen sense of the law would analyze it. Something that she had not foreseen might turn up, and then her brilliant castle would fall in ruins. But there was no doubt in the kindly faces that surrounded her. Even the lawyer's eyes grew dim as he listened to the passionate weeping.

"Nay," he said, gently; "you must not give way. Be courageous for your father's sake."

"My courage seldom fails," she replied, raising her head proudly.

In after-years Philip Lisle remembered the instinct that prompted him to say: "Where is your foster-sister, Susan Rivers' own child?"

"She has gone abroad," replied Rita. "I told her my story before she left England. She knows nothing more of it than I know myself. Her mother never named it to her."

"Then her evidence will be of little use," said Mr. Kent. "Our case is complete without any addition. And now, Miss Lisle," he said, turning to the young girl, "we must not lose one minute. I can imagine the effect this excitement will produce upon Lord Lisle. Have you any friends here, or any arrangements you would like to make?"

"No," she replied; "I have no friends, and I have no plans."

"Could you arrange to start for Lisle Court to-morrow morning?" he asked.

She said there was nothing to detain her.

"Lord Lisle is both rich and generous," said Philip. "If there are any friends or dependents you would like to provide for, do as you will."

"The old woman who lives here has been very good to me since Susan Rivers died," she replied. "It would

perhaps be as well that she should continue to live here, and keep on the little home, for my foster-sister Daisy's sake."

"That is well and kindly thought of," said Mr. Kent.

Mrs. Ferne was called in, and almost lost her senses between surprise and pleasure.

"I guessed it, gentlemen," she cried. "Over and over again I have said Miss Rita was more like a queen than poor Susan's child. Hot-house flowers do not grow in hedge-rows."

CHAPTER XI.

THERE was no rest or sleep that night for the young girl, whose plan succeeded beyond her most sanguine expectations. No doubt had been thrown upon her word; no suspicion came to the skillful lawyer, the trained detective, or the handsome cousin, who appeared to know the world so well. As she stood alone in her room that night, her heart thrilled with triumph. Fate itself seemed to have played into her hands. All she had ever wished for—rank, wealth, position—were now in her grasp. Her good fortune bewildered her.

Yet, as she stood there, in the very hour of her triumph, solemn words, spoken long ago by her dead mother, came back to her. Did an evil deed ever prosper long? Did not retribution, sooner or later, overtake those who betrayed a sacred trust, and usurped rights belonging to another?

"Could evil prosper?" again and again she asked herself the question—her beautiful face becoming graver with every repetition.

"In my case it will!" she said, proudly. "I have conquered circumstances, and will conquer evil, and make it my good."

Far into the night she sat with Mrs. Ferne, telling the details of the story she had made her own.

"And now it turns out," she said, "that my father is a rich nobleman, and not only anxious to see me, but ready to give his whole fortune for the purpose of finding me."

"I always thought it," said Mrs. Ferne. "You were never like poor Susan, or Daisy, either."

"I have one charge to leave with you," said Margaret, after a few minutes of deep silence. "Do you remember that evening, soon after my poor nurse's death, a young man came here to—to say 'good-bye' to me, before he went to sea? Should you know him were you to see him again?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Ferne. "I could never forget his dark face."

"He will come again," said Margaret. "It may be in three years' time—perhaps sooner. When he comes, tell him my story—tell him that my own father has claimed me, and that it will be better for him to forget me, as he will never see me again. No matter what he says—no matter what he offers you—neither tell him my name, nor where I am. I will reward you handsomely if you manage this well."

Mrs. Ferne understood perfectly.

"He shall never know your real name, or where you live, from me," she said. "Make your mind easy about that. He can not know them from any one else."

Margaret thought, as she stood in her room that night, watching the pale stars shining in the quiet night sky, that the future lay smiling before her. Ralph Ashton had been her only fear. Perhaps he might never return; even should he come to seek her, the wonderful change in her fortune would convince him that all further acquaintance was impossible. The cold, ambitious heart felt no pang of regret at the true love she was throwing away.

Philip Lisle looked at his cousin with critical attention

on the following morning as they were starting on their journey. There was nothing unlady-like in the long black dress and sweeping mantilla. The superb beauty of the southern face shone out brightly from amid the clouds of black.

He looked to see if she wept on leaving the humble home that had sheltered her for so long; but there was no trace of tears in those dark, lustrous eyes.

It was a wonderful journey for Rita. She liked the deferential homage of her three companions, who treated her as though she had been a princess. She liked the admiration her beautiful face excited. She liked being called "Miss Lisle," and hearing of her father's prestige, and the grandeur of his race.

The day was drawing near its close when they reached the Hall. The evening gloaming was quiet and calm; a gray shadow seemed to rest upon the world; the flowers were all sleeping, and the birds had gone to rest.

A bright flush rose to Margaret's face as they caught sight of the Hall rising proudly from among the luxuriant trees.

"That is Lisle Court," said Philip to his cousin. "There is not a fairer, prouder home in England. Lord Lisle awaits you there impatiently."

That evening was long remembered by those who lived at the Hall. Lord Lisle wished his daughter to be received with all the honors due to her. The servants in livery were ranged in the hall, ready to welcome their young mistress. Mrs. Wyverne sat in the long drawing-room, in great state and grandeur; but Lord Lisle was too agitated for any public display.

"Mother," said Lord Lisle, "I can not greet my daughter here. I shall remain in my study. Bring her to me, and leave us alone."

He sat there while the sun set in the golden west and the gray glooming spread over the land. He heard at

length the carriage wheels, and knew that in a few minutes he should see Margaret's child again.

There was a murmur of excitement as the carriage stopped at the Hall door. Those who waited there saw a tall, stately lady descend. There was no faltering in her proud bearing; there was no emotion on the beautiful face as they bent before her in lowly greeting.

Mrs. Wyverne stepped forward, and clasped the graceful figure in her arms.

"Let me be the first to welcome you home," she said. "I am your father's mother, Margaret, and you must learn to love me."

"You are very kind," Margaret said, gently; then, turning to Philip Lisle, she asked: "Where is my father? Let me see him soon."

Mrs. Wyverne took her hand, and led her through a long suite of magnificent rooms. They reached the library door at last, and she rapped gently.

"Come in!" said a low, hoarse voice, unlike any she had ever heard.

"Go in alone, dear child," said Mrs. Wyverne. "Try and calm your father—he is not strong."

Rita opened the door. The room was very long, and dim in the gray evening light; but at the upper end she saw a figure with outstretched, trembling arms.

In fancy she had often rehearsed that scene. The reality had come at length.

She walked quickly up the long room and threw herself into the clasp of those loving arms.

"My father," she said, gently; "have I found you at last?"

But he had no such calm words for her; his agitation was pitiful to see. Deep sobs seemed to shake his strong heart; tears dropped from his eyes; he clasped her in his arms as though even death should not part them again.

"My darling," he said—"my little pearl—my Mar-

garet's child? Thank Heaven, I have found you!—thank Heaven, I hold you in my arms again!" He released her then and looked at her. "How beautiful you are!" he said, proudly. "You have not your mother's sweet face and calm, tender eyes. You are beautiful, like some of the ladies of our race, who shone fairest among the fair! Speak to me again, darling! Let me hear if you have your mother's voice?"

"I fear you will be disappointed in me," she said. "I am not like my mother; Susan Rivers told me so. She was fair and gentle; I am dark, like you."

"She had dark hair," said Lord Lisle; "not black, like yours—dark and soft, like the wing of some rare bird. Oh, Margaret! I have never seen you since you were a little babe, and I held you in my arms. What years of happiness I have lost!—but not through my fault—not my fault. My heart has longed for you, darling—I have thirsted for one look at your face—I would have given my life to find you—but all longing seemed vain."

She knelt by his side, and spoke gentle words that soothed him, of the happiness in store for them—of the long years they might yet spend together; and no remorse startled her for the false words that were passing her lips.

Time seemed to fly; but Lord Lisle was roused from his trance of delight by a gentle rap at the door.

"Come in, mother," he said, "I must not be selfish; let me share my happiness. Is Philip there? Come in, Philip; I have much to thank you for. Come and bid my beloved child thrice welcome home."

They vied with each other who should be kindest and most attentive, until, at length, Mrs. Wyverne started up, saying: "How totally unused we are to young ladies! Margaret has never had time to remove her bonnet. Come with me, dear child; I will show you the rooms your father has arranged for you. We found you a maid yesterday—one I think you will like."

Lord Lisle clasped his daughter in his arms again.

"I shall feel anxious every moment you are out of my sight," he said. "Make haste, Margaret."

The two ladies quitted the room together. Then Lord Lisle, turning to his nephew, said: "How beautiful she is, Philip—how dignified and graceful! Her voice is like music. Who can have taught her such manners? Her accent is refined as my own. I am as much surprised as pleased."

"She is very beautiful," said Philip; "but she does not resemble you at all. Her nurse was a superior woman, and appears to have strained every nerve to give both girls a good education. Miss Lisle's foster-sister has gone abroad as governess to some young lady."

"She must return, then," said Lord Lisle. "I will do to her as her good and generous mother did to my child. She shall be Margaret's sister still—in more than name."

That evening Lord Lisle seemed to regain all his lost strength and energy. His mother looked on him with eyes full of happy tears.

After dinner a solemn council was held in the library. While it lasted, Lord Lisle held Rita's hand in his.

She showed him the proofs of her story—the letters written by Margaret Wyverne, her mother, to Susan Rivers, her nurse—letters that spoke so lovingly of the dear husband who lay ill, and the little child she was so grieved to leave behind her.

She showed the quaint ring, with its legend: "No love out of this ring"—the locket where Lord Lisle's hair was intertwined with that of his wife.

"These are all my treasures," she said. "My mother left nothing more."

"They are quite enough to establish your identity," said Mr. Kent, who, at Lord Lisle's urgent request, remained for the evening.

Lord Lisle held them in his hands. How vividly he re-

membered the day he had placed that ring on his wife's finger, and her pretty, happy pride when he gave her the locket.

"Margaret," he said, "I will give you whatever you ask, if you will give me this locket and ring. Your mother's face rises before me as I gaze upon them. You shall have diamonds a queen might envy, if you will give me these."

She looked at him with a bright smile.

"They are yours," she said, gently; "even as I am yours—because they belonged to my mother. No diamonds, however valuable, could pay for them."

Then a scene took place which gratified Rita's ambition. Lord Lisle assembled his servants and dependents, and formally introduced their young mistress; telling, in brief, clear words, the story of her loss and recovery. Mrs. Markham was there, and a half fear, half dread passed through Rita's mind, as Lord Lisle said, with a smile: "My daughter has altered since you saw her last, and, Mrs. Markham, is there any feature you recognize?"

"None, my lord," she replied. "I remember her mother's face vividly, but I can not recall Miss Lisle's."

It was an evening of triumph unmarred by one drawback.

Lord Lisle talked much to Margaret of her foster-sister. He was charmed with her replies, although he wondered much that she showed no great pleasure when he avowed his intention of adopting her.

"You must lay aside this heavy mourning to-morrow," said Lord Lisle. "My mother has taken care to provide you with a *trousseau*. I shall add jewelry to your taste."

When the darkness and silence of night had fallen over the Hall, while Lord Lisle dreamed of his dead wife and living child, Margaret said to herself: "It was a brilliant play. and I acted my part well."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MONTH passed, and Margaret found herself with every wish of her heart gratified. She had longed for rich dresses wherewith to adorn the wondrous beauty that had been so fatal a dower. She had them now in abundance. Mrs. Wyverne herself selected a *trousseau* that might have suited a princess. Lord Lisle wished that neither expense nor trouble should be spared. She had longed for jewels; her father gave her the celebrated "Lisle diamonds"—considered by connoisseurs as some of the finest stones in England. He lavished presents upon her—delicate, glowing pearls; opals of rare and beautiful hues; rich rubies, "flashing red;" emeralds with a rare, golden light in their green depths. There were times when she shut herself in her room alone with her treasures; she took them from their velvet beds, and placed them on her neck and arms; and as she did so, and the wondrous diamonds flashed like points of flame, she smiled contemptuously over the earrings Ralph had given her and which she had once thought so magnificent.

A French waiting-maid, who understood her business and knew how to make the most of Rita's dark, glowing beauty, had been engaged to attend her. Lord Lisle purchased a magnificent horse especially for her, and she was, in a very short time, taught to ride; everything that love, luxury, or comfort could suggest was always at her command to the very moment.

On the day following her arrival, Lord Lisle himself took her over the Hall, showing her the state-rooms, the picture-gallery, the magnificent modern apartments, the treasures of art, the statues brought from Italy, the gold and silver plate—in itself worth a king's ransom.

He was proud of the beautiful girl who swept through

these gorgeous rooms; she said nothing of the wonder they excited in her. That, she thought, would show a want of good taste. But when they came to the picture-gallery, and Lord Lisle raised the heavy velvet hangings, she stood for a few minutes in mute surprise.

"It is a grand old place—my father!" she said, proudly.

"And a grand old race to whom it belongs," he replied. "I know of no family whose annals are so stainless as our own. Our men have ever been brave, our women pure. No Lisle ever yet brought even the shadow of shame or disgrace upon his name. The deepest regret of my life is that your mother did not live to take her place here."

"Have you no portrait of my mother?" asked Rita.

"Yes," replied Lord Lisle. "I shall take it to Italy with me and have a larger one painted from it, to hang up here. There will be no sweeter, fairer face in the gallery than that of Margaret Lisle!"

They went on through the long corridors, until they reached the eastern wing of the Hall.

"There are some nice rooms here," said Lord Lisle, "but they have not been used of late years. Dame Sybella Lisle died here, and her portrait hangs still in her room. We will go to see it. It is considered a fine work of art."

But when they stood before it, Rita, for one half moment, lost her self-command, her lips grew white, and a dark shadow dimmed her eyes as she gazed upon it.

The face was pure and fair, with a refined spiritual expression on the delicate features; the brow was clear and pure; the violet eyes lustrous and tender; bright golden hair rippled over a white neck; the sweet lips were parted with a smile; it was the very face of Daisy—Daisy whom she had betrayed, robbed of her birthright, and deceived!

"I must have the picture removed. It should be in the gallery, not here!"

"Are these rooms ever used?" asked Rita.

"Not often," replied Lord Lisle. "A gem like this should not hang here unnoticed. It is one of the finest pictures we have. I must attend to the removal."

Even as he spoke, Rita was thinking how it could best be destroyed. Daisy's face resembled it so perfectly, that every one must observe the likeness. Rapidly as lightning the thought passed through her mind.

"Grant me a favor, dear papa!" she said. "I like this picture; will you allow me to have it in my own room?"

Only too pleased to comply with any request that came from his darling child, Lord Lisle consented. Before night the portrait of Lady Sybella Lisle was hung in her room.

"You like your home, then, Margaret?" said Lord Lisle, as they stood upon the broad terrace overlooking the fragrant flower garden.

"Yes," she replied, gently. "My only regret is that I did not know it years ago."

"It has not been mine very long," said Lord Lisle. "You should understand that Lisle Court and the title are both entailed. At my death they go to Philip. He will be Lord Lisle." He did not see the dismayed expression that crossed her face, but continued: "The estates of Helsmeir, in Scotland, and Endsleigh in Yorkshire, are my own. They are not entailed. At my death they will be yours; but Lisle Court goes to Philip, together with all the fair, broad domain that surrounds it."

She made no reply, but the words were never forgotten.

Lord Lisle watched his daughter attentively. Her beauty and dignity charmed him. She never betrayed any ungainliness or awkwardness of manner. There was nothing in her that told how the early years of her life had been spent. Her accent was good—she spoke well—she was quick and apt in imitation; but there was a something wanting. She had wit and repartee; but Lord Lisle saw plainly that at times in conversation she was lost. She

could not speak of books—she had read but little—or of pictures. She knew little of art or of music. She did not know the names of leading statesmen; and occasionally Lord Lisle detected a flush of annoyance on the beautiful face when she felt her own deficiencies.

He talked long and earnestly to Mrs. Wyverne; and between them a plan was arranged which they thought would settle all difficulties.

Lord Lisle went in search of his daughter. He found her in the garden, sitting under the spreading shade of a large cedar-tree.

“Rita,” he said, gently, sitting on the grass by her side, “we must have a long conversation. How old are you?”

“Just eighteen!” she replied, with some little surprise.

Then Lord Lisle, with paternal fondness, clasped her hands in his.

“You must not be hurt or vexed at what I am going to say, my darling,” he began, “and, above all, do not think I am dissatisfied with you. I am more proud of you than of anything else in the world. But there are a few little deficiencies we must try to remedy. It is usual for a young lady of your rank and position to be presented at Court, and make her *début* in the grand world.”

“Yes,” she said, brightly; “grandmamma has been telling me all about it. I am impatient for the time to come.”

“You must learn to wait,” he replied, with a smile. “It is on this subject I want to speak to you. You are only eighteen. I should like you to devote two entire years to fitting yourself for your place in the world.” He saw the keen look of disappointment, and hastened to add: “They shall be happy years, my darling. I will take you abroad. We will go to France and to Italy. We will take with us some clever and accomplished lady, who will give you what my mother calls finishing touches. You must learn the names of great authors and read their

works. You must see the finest pictures in Italy, and learn all about the artists who painted them. You must study the great world, its code of manners, its forms and etiquette, before you go into it."

"I understand," she said, sadly.

"Nay," said Lord Lisle; "it is a matter for smiles, not sighs. I venture to predict, Rita, that in two years' time, when we return, you will create a sensation not easily forgotten. You might do so now, but I prefer this time of probation. What do you say—are you willing?"

"Yes," she replied, "and grateful. I see how necessary it is."

"Did you ever learn anything of music or singing?" asked Lord Lisle.

"No," she replied. "My foster-sister Daisy sings."

"Ah, well," said Lord Lisle, "we must never dream of blaming poor Susan; it was quite natural that she should do the best for her own child. She has received a better education than you?"

"Yes," was the false answer. "Mrs. Rivers was everything that was kind to me; but she treated Daisy differently."

The words rang out clear and soft on the bright summer air, and no one was there to say how cruel and false they were.

"That reminds me," said Lord Lisle. "I am very anxious, Rita, that your foster-sister should come to live with you. I owe to her mother a debt of gratitude that nothing can pay. I want to do as she did—make her child my own."

No light or happiness came into the beautiful face Lord Lisle watched so lovingly.

"Of course you love her very dearly?" he continued.

"Yes," she replied, calmly. "I loved poor little Daisy," but the tone of voice in which she spoke had no ring of music—no enthusiasm.

"Is she plain or stupid?" asked Lord Lisle, anxiously.

"Neither," she replied, more earnestly. "I think her pretty. She is very fair and gentle; fond of reading and drawing. Oh, papa, they were kind to me, but I was not happy there. I should like to forget that past, and Daisy would remind me of it."

Lord Lisle looked hurt and disappointed. With her keen, shrewd instinct she saw and noted it.

"Do not misunderstand me, dear papa," she said. "Like yourself, I feel all that I owe to Daisy's mother. I would cheerfully give Daisy all I have, but I—do not laugh at me—I want to be alone with you a little longer. She is clever; she sings sweetly; perhaps you might love her better than your own poor little Rita."

She looked so beautiful, so loving and charming, that Lord Lisle clasped her in his arms and laughed heartily.

"Jealous!" he said. "You are positively jealous, Rita! Well, your quiet shall not be disturbed yet. You tell me Daisy is with her friends at Florence. We may see her there, and then we can arrange. I must leave you now. I am going over to Grafton Hall. Tell me, may I consider the matter settled? Are you willing to go abroad?"

"I shall like it above all things," she said, gayly. "I shall soon learn all about the great world, papa."

Lord Lisle left her sitting under the grand old cedar-tree. As he went down the broad path he turned to look once more at her. She was smiling at him, and he thought in all the world there was nothing so bright or beautiful as his daughter's face. When he disappeared from among the green trees, the smile died away, the brightness all faded. A look of care and anxiety came over the dark eyes.

"I must do something," she said. "She must not come here! No human evidence can ever be brought against me; but that face will strike every one! She must

not come until I am safe—until I am Philip Lisle's wife! Nothing can matter then!"

While the birds sung, and the fair flowers bloomed—while the sun shone, and the soft summer air whispered of love, peace, and happiness, she sat thinking, scheming, and inventing.

She had succeeded beyond her wildest hopes. Her fraud had been a complete success. There came to her no remorseful memory of the dying mother whose trust she had betrayed; no compunction or sorrow for the gentle girl from whom she had stolen home, love, and everything else.

She sat through the summer morning, busy with two thoughts. One was how to keep Daisy from Lisle Court; the other, how to win the heart of Philip Lisle. The whole ambition of her soul was centered in that one idea—she *must* be Lady Lisle—Lady Margaret Lisle! As she murmured the name to herself a smile rippled over her lips, for she thought of Ralph Ashton and the vow he had forced her to take. She thought of him without love—without anything but contempt. The fierce, passionate love he had lavished upon her was forgotten or unheeded. She disliked even to think of that miserable past. She was to be Lady Lisle!

Lord Lisle did not delay in making arrangements. Before the end of the week he had secured the assistance of a clever, accomplished lady, the widow of one of his fellow-officers, a high-bred, refined woman, who gladly undertook the charge of his daughter.

Mrs. Marche seemed instinctively to understand all that was required of her. She was to help the young lady to acquire a polish and grace of manner that as yet she had not. She was to teach those little mysteries of etiquette that can only be learned from those accustomed to good society. Far as lay in her power, she was to cultivate her mind and intellect.

Mrs. Wyverne remained at Lisle Court. Philip Lisle thought it probable that he might join his uncle in Italy when he went there. They were to go to Paris first, and remain there a year. During that year masters of all kinds were to instruct Miss Lisle. She resolved to devote herself to study and acquiring the polish of high life.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE year passed rapidly enough. At its close Margaret was barely recognizable. All that cultivation could do for her was done. All trace of the cottage education had disappeared; the musical voice had become clear and distinct as a silver bell; all little eccentricities of speech and manner had disappeared; her language, even, had become remarkable for its elegant simplicity and force.

The half-conscious manner had disappeared, and a graceful dignity had taken its place. Margaret had spared no pains. She read, and, above all, listened to the conversation of clever and talented men. She was so quick, so apt in all imitation, that nothing escaped her. The names of great men and great works were no longer a dead letter to her; she could converse intelligently and well. Her wonderful beauty had been carefully cultivated also. Few would have recognized in the queenly girl, whose magnificent face drew all eyes, the rustic beauty who had listened so eagerly to Ralph Ashton's praises.

Lord Lisle was more than satisfied with that one year's training.

News came often from England. Mrs. Wyverne found plenty to do in managing the Hall. Philip was busily engaged in the care of the estate. Lord Lisle wrote, pressing him to join them at Rome, and spend some months with them.

"Do come, Philip," he wrote. "I want you to see

what progress Rita has made. I want to know what you think of her."

They went to Naples, and from there Lord Lisle wrote a most kind letter to Daisy, pressing her to pay them a visit.

"I want you to live with us," he said; "to be as one of my own children; to be Rita's sister, as you have always been. Come and stay with us for some months first, and then we can decide about the future."

And Daisy, in reply, said that in two months the term for which she had engaged herself to the Denhams would expire, and then she would gladly rejoin her sister. Philip's letter reached Naples the same morning, saying he should be with them during that week.

He came one beautiful evening when the sky was cloudless, and the waters of the bay, half blue, half golden, rippled and broke musically upon the shore. Lord Lisle had gone out, and Mrs. Marche was engaged when he arrived. He was ushered into a room that seemed to be all sunlight and flowers. He saw there a dignified and beautiful woman, who received him with exquisite grace. He cried out in amazement, "Miss Lisle, how you have altered! I did not know you."

Nor could he cease from wondering. His eyes wandered from the peerless face to the magnificent dress. In his ears the musical voice lingered like a spell. Could this be the young girl he had found in the little cottage at Queen's Lynne? Rita saw and noted his surnrise. It was to her the most flattering compliment he could have paid. She remembered her first interview with him, when he had seemed to her something quite different from the common race of men. His handsome face and high-bred manner, his careless ease and debonair style, had charmed and amazed her. She had seen no one like him. And now this man, who had appeared to her like a king, grew confused in her presence. They had changed places.

Philip received the warmest welcome from Lord Lisle.

"You will stay with us, of course," he said. "Do not talk of hotels; we shall be quite a happy family. Do just as you like, but do not think of leaving us."

When they were alone, Lord Lisle turned to his kinsman.

"Philip," he said, gravely, "tell me the exact truth; what do you think of Margaret now?"

"My dear uncle," he replied, "you might just as well ask me to write a poem, or paint a picture. In a few words, she is the most perfectly beautiful girl I ever saw; the change in her is so marvelous. I see no fault or blemish, and my whole heart rejoices in your happiness."

Lord Lisle looked delighted.

"I shall take her home next year and introduce her," he said. "I long to see her take her place in the great world."

"She will adorn it," said Philip. "How about her foster-sister? Have you seen her yet?"

"She will join us in a few weeks, I expect," replied Lord Lisle; "we shall all return to England together. You must go with me to Garci's studio to-morrow, and see the copy he is making of my dear wife's portrait."

"Miss Lisle does not in the least resemble any of the ladies of our race," said the young man.

"No, not much. But, Philip, related as we are, why do you persist in calling my daughter Miss Lisle? Surely she may be Margaret to you."

"My dear uncle," replied the young man, his face flushing, "I should require desperate courage to make the attempt. Believe me, at present I dare not. I can imagine the flash of those black eyes, if I venture to call their owner 'Margaret.'"

Lord Lisle laughed with quiet amusement. Rita's dignity and hauteur had often pleased and surprised him; and

now, to see that they produced the same effect upon his gay and handsome young kinsman, pleased him still more.

A new life began for Rita—a new revelation came to her under that Neapolitan sky. She had played at love with Ralph Ashton. She had always thought of it as a means to an end. In her own mind she laughed at all pathetic stories. Riches, honor, title, with her all ranked before love. She thought but little of it. She had no sweet, girlish dreams of something to come which should brighten her life and change it. But her heart was waking. She had planned to herself a marriage with Philip Lisle, but love had no part in the plan.

Her heart was waking from its long dream of vanity and coldness. Philip's face haunted her. She could not forget it. His voice sounded ever in her ears—so gay, so generous, chivalrous, and noble. Who was like him? No false or mean word ever stained his lips—no selfish thought ever came near him. He was not handsome as an Apollo, or gifted with the keenest intellect; but his kindly, comely face had all the charm of truth and nobility. One felt instinctively, on looking at him, that he was a man in whose hands honor and life might safely be trusted; and withal, he had a high-bred, *degagé* manner that fascinated and won all who approached him.

The time came to Rita when the name of Philip Lisle sounded like sweetest music in her ears—earth held none sweeter; when to be near him, to hear him talk, to feel his admiring glance upon her, was the keenest pleasure earth could give her—keener far than the happiness that she found in wealth and honor. She began to study him, to lay herself out to please him; the proud face softened for him; the haughty lips gave him smiles and words no other ever received. It was a wonderful love—wonderful from its concentration. She had no other thought, no other idea. To have won him she would have laid down her life. Such a love might have been the redemption of

another woman; in that grand, erring, ambitious nature it was but another source of destruction.

Philip admired his cousin; he thought her wonderfully beautiful and most wonderfully proud. He was kind and affectionate to her, after the manner of an elder brother; but as to love, he never even gave it a thought; it never occurred to him to fall in love with Lord Lisle's daughter.

It was a new life to her—new and strange. Beauty seemed to have fallen over the world. Sunshine and flowers spoke to her as they had never done before. Gentle thoughts came to her—the fierce ambition and pride that had led her into great crime faded. There were times even when she longed to be good and true, that she might be worthy of his love, when she would have wished the sin “unsinned.” She understood him well; she read the loyal, simple nature that could forgive any crime save one like hers. She knew that if ever Philip Lisle should learn what she had done, he would never look at her or speak to her again. “But there is no danger,” she said to herself—“there is no danger. He will never know.”

She tried to win him. She used her beauty, her talents, her wit; but all in vain. When the blue sea was calm they sailed for hours together over the sunlit waters of the bay; they wandered through groves of fragrant orange-trees; they lingered by the purple vines and green myrtle; but in no place, and at no hour, did Philip ever utter those words she longed to hear.

Lord Lisle had taken a pretty villa on the outskirts of Naples. Beautiful gardens surrounded it, sloping down to the water's edge. The windows were thickly covered with creeping flowers and bright blossoms; the balconies looked like one mass of evergreen.

The room they preferred had a large window opening on a balcony, around which the vines clung in profusion; they hung in such thick clusters that one standing outside could hardly be seen by those in the room. Lord Lisle liked

that balcony better than any other part of the house. From it there was a view unequaled for beauty; the Bay of Naples lay shining in the summer sun; the distant mountains raised their tall heads; all the luxuriant loveliness of the fair land was spread out in one gorgeous picture. In this balcony Lord Lisle passed many happy hours. He learned there, too, a secret that even in death he never forgot.

One morning, when Rita was busily engaged with Mrs. Marche, he went to say good-bye for a few hours. He kissed her, and said he should soon return. On leaving the house, however, Lord Lisle found the sun so warm that he resolved to defer his visit until evening. He re-entered the house unseen by any one except the servant who admitted him, fetched a book, then retired to his favorite balcony to read. The shade of the vine-leaves was most grateful, and he was congratulating himself upon his wisdom when Margaret entered the room, and Philip followed her.

"Lord Lisle is out," said Philip. "I think I shall follow his example. These sunny days are made for outdoor enjoyment.

"If a broiling sun gives enjoyment," said Rita, "you will have plenty of it. You said something about reading to us this morning."

Philip laughed gayly.

"Imagine," he said, "reading 'Lalla Rookh' on a day like this! I never can be sentimental when the sun is warm. Ah, Miss Lisle, I must crave pardon for my bad taste, but I think a row on that smiling sea will be better than all the poetry that ever was written."

A pained, wistful look came over her face. Lord Lisle was about to speak, when Philip resumed, gayly, "I am always at your service, but I think our reading will come off better in the evening; my uncle enjoys it then."

Something constrained and unnatural in Margaret's voice caught Lord Lisle's attention.

"Let it be so, then," she said, quietly. A beautiful bouquet of orange-blossom and myrtles lay upon the table near her. She took it in her hands.

"How fragrant those flowers are!" said Philip. She selected the prettiest spray of blossoms, and held it out to him.

He took it from her, held it carelessly for a few moments, then laid it down upon the table.

"The perfume is overpowering this morning," he said. "After all, I like our English flowers best. Nothing can equal our violets and lilies. There is as much, and just the same kind of difference between Italian and English flowers, as there is between Italian and English women. Do you not think so, Miss Lisle?"

"It is possible," she said. "I like the fragrant, richly colored flowers the best."

Philip laughed, and, with a bow to his cousin, quitted the room, leaving the sprig of orange-blossom carelessly upon the table.

For some moments she stood listening to the echo of his footsteps. The sound ceased at last, and she knelt where he had stood, burying her face in the flowers. She wept with a passionate abandonment pitiful to see.

"He does not love me!" she said; "he does not even care for me! The flower I gave him is of no value. He does not care for me, and I—oh, dear Heaven!—I love him better than my life!"

When the passionate fit of weeping ended, she took the little flower and left the room.

Lord Lisle saw and heard it all. His first emotion was one of unmitigated surprise; his second, one of profound pity for his daughter.

"She loves him," he said to himself. "I believed her

too proud to love any man. Ah, if her mother had lived, she would have known what to do!"

Lord Lisle never mentioned that little scene. On his daughter's face, when they next met, there was no sign of love.

CHAPTER XIV.

LORD LISLE continually thought of that scene—those passionate tears—that bitter cry. He knew that his proud, beautiful daughter loved her cousin with all the force of her heart—with all the strength of her nature. He was grieved, for he saw nothing like love on Philip's part. No one could be more chivalrous, gay, and kind than Lord Lisle's heir, but there was no love either in his looks or words.

He watched his daughter; but she never betrayed her secret. At times, when Philip spoke to her suddenly, he saw her face flush and her dark, lustrous eyes grow brighter. But pride and hauteur wrapped her round like a garment. He could have believed the scene he had witnessed from the balcony a dream.

He saw, too, that although Rita guarded her secret as she guarded her life, there were times when she was jealous of every one else to whom Philip spoke. The pretty, fair-haired Countess Guardi was then considered the belle of Naples. Fair and coquettish, with bright eyes, charming smiles, and winning words, she was more popular and more admired than any other woman in Naples.

She liked Philip, and immediately upon her introduction began a little flirtation with him. She gave him her brightest smiles and gayest words, much to the amusement of her indulgent husband, who looked with something like commiseration on his wife's favorite.

It was all innocent nonsense, and the count knew it.

His pretty, petted wife must have homage and admiration.

Lord Lisle and his daughter received many invitations to the Villa Guardi, the beautiful and luxurious home of the fair-haired countess. She was fond of charades—of operettas—of tableaux. Miss Lisle charmed her; that dark, magnificent beauty was the very foil she needed for her own. She was never weary in arranging tableaux in which she could act with Miss Lisle.

All the gayety and fashion of Naples assembled at the villa; dances, soirées, evening parties, morning rides, excursions both on sea and land, were constantly going on; the center and soul of all were the Countess Guardi and Miss Lisle.

The Neapolitans raved about her; the fair face, with its delicate rose-leaf bloom, the dark, lustrous eyes, and magnificent crown of black hair, had a great charm. "The beautiful Miss Lisle!" Gentlemen flirted with the pretty countess, but they admired Miss Lisle.

Lord Lisle was delighted at his daughter's success. Mingling with this, the best and highest society in Naples, her manners became formed, her natural taste for all that was elegant became developed. He saw the time had come when he might safely present his daughter, and the most fastidious could find no fault in her.

Rita might have had lovers in abundance—Italian counts, French gentlemen, and Austrian nobles would fain have wooed and won the beautiful daughter of the rich English nobleman; but she smiled upon none. She accepted their homage in a queenly, graceful way that was infinitely charming and full of piquancy. None of them had power to move her. Lord Lisle laughed at her numerous conquests; Philip rallied her; Mrs. Marche was proud of her pupil; but Rita cared little. Her ambition was gratified; men hung upon her words; they would have risked much for her smiles; she could rule brave and

noble hearts, touch them with a look, move them with a word. She was courted, admired, and flattered; homage and adulation followed her; but the time came when Rita would have yielded this sovereignty of youth and beauty for one smile from Philip.

The Countess Guardi sent out invitations for a ball. "It was to be," she said, "a faint imitation of fairy-land." No one was asked who had not some special claim to public favor—pretty girls, eligible men, but no "bores." The number of guests invited was small. The rooms were splendidly decorated with flowers; the long conservatories were lighted up; lamps gleamed like stars amid the green foliage and rich blossoms; pretty fountains rippled musically out in the pleasure grounds, that ran down to the shore; the lights shone amid the trees. Every one talked of the *recherché* entertainment given by the fair countess.

Lord Lisle wished his daughter to look her best on this evening; he thought it impossible that Philip could help loving her. He wished his nephew to see her in the full blaze of her regal beauty—the queen of the ball, admired and sought by all.

The same idea came to Rita herself. She spared no pains over her toilet, and its result was perfection. Mrs. Marche, whose taste was far more than good, chose the style of dress.

A rich, sweeping, flowing robe of rose-colored satin, shaded with costly white lace, that fell like a white, soft cloud. Costly diamonds were clasped round the white throat and on the fair, rounded arms. Diamonds glistened in the coils of black hair that crowned the queenly head, and a beautiful blush-rose nestled against her bosom.

When Rita entered the room where Lord Lisle and Philip awaited her, they both started with admiration. Lord Lisle kissed the beautiful face with proud, tender affection. Philip said, gayly, "Ah, Miss Lisle, our little

countess will be eclipsed this evening. Old England will show her supremacy. I place myself in the ranks of the red rose."

Rita was charmed by the fairy-like scene. The soft, sweet music seemed to thrill the air; rare perfumes came from rose-flowers; the little fountains rippled musically.

"There are pleasant scenes in this world," she said, turning to Philip. "There are two sides to life. This is the bright one; the other—"

"The other you shall never see," he interrupted. "Ah! *ma belle cousine*, moralizing in a ball-room—how thoroughly English!"

"Thoughts fly swiftly," she replied; "the ripple of that water took me back for one moment to Queen's Lynne. I was on the sea-shore."

"Forget that miserable time," said Philip, warmly. "We all try our best to make you forget it, Rita; do we not?"

He had never called her Rita before, and a warm flush covered her face. The rose in her bosom trembled with the quick beating of her heart.

Before she had time to reply the countess joined them.

"I am so glad you have come!" she said, in her pretty broken English. "My rooms seemed dark without you."

She spoke to Rita and looked at Philip. He, perfectly accustomed to the lady's arrangements of look and speech, was much amused.

In a few minutes Miss Lisle was the center of a group of admirers. Then she showed to advantage; bright, witty words, clever sayings, graceful actions and movements charmed her courtiers. Prince Dalgarin prayed for the first waltz. She had hoped Philip would care for that, but he was still talking to their fair hostess. Count d'Arni, one of the proudest men in Naples, sued humbly for the second.

It seemed like a dream. She was strongly haunted that

night by the recollection of Queen's Lynne. In every pause of the soft, sweet music she heard the sea beating in and breaking upon the shore. She heard Ralph Ashton crying out that he loved her and could not live without her. It was like a dream that she should be queen of that brilliant room; that men of noble birth and high estate should sue so humbly for one smile. Yet it was all true, and she had done all this for herself.

"It has prospered," she thought to herself, "after all. It is not true to say that evil never succeeds—evil has been my good."

It was later on in the evening when Philip sought Rita's side.

"Can you find time for one dance with me?" he asked, gently. "You are surrounded by so many courtiers I have little chance, I fear."

He was somewhat startled by the expression of her eyes as she raised them to his face; for once her secret shone there—passion and tenderness lingered in their dark depths. In her heart she was wondering that he did not know how utterly indifferent she was to every one but himself.

Her only reply was rising and placing her hand on his arm. Rita was a good dancer—graceful and easy, every movement full of harmony and the very poetry of motion.

The music sounded sweetly and softly. She never forgot the happiness of that time. Philip's face smiling down into hers; Philip's arm, with its strong, light clasp around her; Philip's voice whispering kind words—it was one half hour of perfect happiness. She saw admiring eyes follow her; she heard murmurs of admiration from those who watched her; but she was indifferent to all and everything save Philip.

The last notes of the waltz died away, and Philip, turning to her, said:

"You must be tired—" He stopped abruptly as his

glance fell upon her bright face. He saw the light in her dark eyes; he saw the blush-rose in her bosom; its fragrance came to him like a faint, sweet whisper. Her beauty had never struck Philip so forcibly before. "You should be tired," he resumed, "but I see no trace of fatigue."

"And I feel none," she replied, with a smile.

She carried in her hand a bouquet of white roses and lilies. Philip bent over them.

"Give me one of those flowers, *belle cousine*," he said, "in memory of a dance I shall never forget."

He meant nothing more than a pretty, flattering compliment, but the words thrilled the girl's heart. She took a delicate rosebud, half shrouded in green leaves, from her fragrant bouquet.

"You will leave it somewhere to fade and die," she said.

"Nay," replied Philip, gallantly; "it shall live near my heart."

A shadow startled them. Looking up, Rita saw the countess by her side. The pretty coquette was looking her best that evening. Her rich white dress was looped up with white lilies, her fair hair beautifully arranged; white lilies drooped from it; the same delicate flowers nestled in her bodice.

"I am interrupting a pretty scene," she said. "You English people understand the sentimental, after all. Mr. Lisle, I have been looking for you. The Princess Doriati wishes for an introduction. Prepare yourself to be all that is fascinating."

Philip did not respond with his usual alacrity, and a pretty look, half smile, half frown, came over the lady's face.

"I see," she said. "You would rather remain here."

"Yes," said Philip. "If I consulted inclination only

I would rather remain here; but your wish, Madame la Comtessa, is my law."

"I shall be glad to rest here for a few minutes," said Rita. "Do not mind leaving me alone."

They went away together. She wished to be alone to dream over the happiness that she believed was coming to her—to dream over the words and looks that made her music and sunshine. Not there, where at any moment a gay crowd might surround her. Rita went through the long conservatory, out into the pleasant, moonlit garden, where the lilies and roses perfumed the night air. She sat down on one of the pretty seats placed near the fountain. The night was solemn and still; pale stars gleamed in the darkling sky, the moonbeams gave a silver radiance to water and trees; the flowers were sleeping; only the roses seemed to be awake and greeting her with perfume. Far off, like the sweet, faint echo of a dream, she heard the rise and fall of the music. She was alone—alone with the beauty of the summer night and her own love.

"He is beginning to love me," she thought.

He had called her Rita; he had lingered by her side; he had asked for the flower. He would love her in time; and earth held no pleasure, no happiness, for her save in his love. She had believed ambition, pride, and love of admiration to be the master-passions of her life. This love was even stronger. She would rather—ah! ten thousand times rather—be poor with Philip than share the throne of a king.

"I love him," she murmured—"who never knew what love meant—who never cared for it! I love him—and he must love me in return!"

Nothing like pity crossed her mind for the man who had cared so much for her—who had left her believing that she would be true to him and wait for him.

When the thought of Ralph Ashton came it was with a sense of loathing and contempt—a wonder that she could

ever have endured the sound of his voice or the touch of his hands.

Out among the lilies and roses she dreamed of the love she hoped to win—of the bright future, of the title, the honors, the grandeur that awaited her. The solemn stars, the sleeping flowers, the whispering night wind brought no bright or holy thoughts—they brought no remorse, no pity, no compunction—and she smiled brightly, thinking that her evil deed had prospered and would bear good fruit.

CHAPTER XV.

“PHILIP,” said Lord Lisle to his nephew, a few days after the ball, “have you ever thought of marrying?”

Mr. Lisle laughed.

“As a remote possibility, uncle,” he replied. “If you ask the question seriously, I answer seriously, I have never thought earnestly of it.”

“Yet you are old enough now,” said Lord Lisle, “and you know many nice girls. How is it?”

“I have not ‘met my fate,’” said Philip. “I know clever girls—beautiful girls; but I have not yet met *the* girl I should like to marry.”

Lord Lisle felt something like a sharp pang of sorrow at these very honest words.

“You may be mistaken,” he said.

“No,” interrupted Philip. “Like all other young men, uncle, I have my ideal wife. I do not care so much for beauty; but she must be fair, and sweet, and gracious, true and modest, refined and sensitive—a kind of violet.”

“There are many such,” said Lord Lisle.

“I believe it,” was the laughing reply; “but I have not yet met that particular violet I am destined to win and wear.”

“How can you know that?” asked the uncle.

"Because," he replied, "I am a great believer in first love. Some day I shall meet a young girl, and I shall say to myself the first time I see her, 'I must win her for my own.' I am no believer in love founded upon intimate acquaintance and constant association."

Lord Lisle sighed deeply; but he said no more. There was no hope, then, for his darling child. Ah, if Philip could but know, could but understand the treasure he had won!

A few days afterward, one of Philip's old college friends, Lord Carlow, came over to Naples. He was going on a yachting expedition, and pressed Philip to join him. They should return, he said, in a month or six weeks.

Philip looked anxiously at Lord Lisle when the invitation was given.

"It will be a sad interruption to all our gayeties," he said. "Madame la Comtessa will lose her right hand. Still, if Philip would like it, by all means let him go."

And Philip went. Rita lost no hope. He would return, she thought, tired of the sea, tired of being always with gentlemen, and then she might charm him more easily.

It seemed a strange coincidence that on the very day he left a letter came from Daisy, saying that, in accordance with Lord Lisle's wish, she would be with them on Tuesday.

Lord Lisle was unfeignedly pleased.

"She will find you much changed, Rita," he said. "What will she think of you? Poor little Daisy! we must all be very kind to her; she is quite alone in the world."

"When is she coming?" asked Rita, in a low voice.

He thought she was agitated at the thought of seeing her sister.

"On Tuesday," he replied; "and, Rita darling, I shall leave the arrangements of her room with you. Remember, that even as her mother took you, a poor, friendless

child, to her heart, and shared all she had with you, so we must make her one of ourselves. She is to be treated in every way as your sister. I shall have two daughters instead of one. You know her, see that every taste and wish is consulted. You will be very happy, my darling, now."

"Yes, very happy," she murmured; "and I will see to everything for Daisy."

Yet if for one moment she could have had her will she would have smitten the gentle girl dead. In her dream, in her all-absorbing love, she had forgotten her, forgotten the danger that might come with her, forgotten almost the evil deed and treachery that had given her Daisy's place. It came home to her like a mortal blow; yet she was powerless to avert it. In vain she watched the long night through, trying to think of some plan or expedient which should keep Daisy away. But none of them did she dare to put into practice, lest they should excite suspicion. She remembered the puzzled look on Lord Lisle's face when she had dissented before. She dare not offer any more objections; suspicion and mistrust would surely follow them.

"I must meet it boldly," she said to herself. "I have played for a grand stake; it is worth some risk, some bravery. If I meet the danger boldly, I shall conquer in the end."

She busied herself in superintending the preparations for Daisy. She placed flowers and books in her room. She told Lord Lisle how fond her sister was of music; how sweetly she sung. A magnificent piano was purchased for her. Had she been the daughter and heiress coming home, there could not have been more preparation.

Rita spoke of her continually. She told the countess her foster-sister was coming to live with her.

Madame's first question was:

"Is she pretty?"

When Rita answered that she was very fair and sweet,

with golden hair, the color of Beatrice Cenci's, madame answered:

"Ah, a blonde! Then I shall dislike her. The only blonde in the world I admire or like is myself."

Which very characteristic speech being repeated to Lord Lisle by Rita caused him great amusement.

It was late on Tuesday afternoon when Daisy reached the villa. Lord Lisle, with the delicate tact that distinguished him, thought it would be better for the two young girls to meet alone.

Rita nerved herself for the effort. Brave and courageous as she was, when the carriage drove up to the door her heart beat so that she could hardly see or hear. Some few minutes afterward Daisy entered the room, and Rita's eyes were drawn to her with a look that was half dread, half fear.

Daisy—a tall, elegant girl, with a sweet, pure face and tender eyes; Daisy, grown and altered, yet with the same smile, the same spiritual expression, the same clear, musical voice, and the face so fatally like the pictured face of Dame Sybella Lisle.

There was no suspicion in Daisy's heart. She clasped her arms round Rita's neck, her eyes wet with happy tears.

"Rita, my darling," she cried, "I am so glad and happy to come to you. How kind and good Lord Lisle is! I shall never be able to thank him. I can not possibly believe that I am to live in this beautiful home, and call it mine."

"It is to be so," said Rita. "We are to be sisters here, Daisy, just as we were at Queen's Lynne. We are both to be Lord Lisle's daughters."

Daisy clasped her little white hands in a transport of gratitude.

"It is like a fairy-tale," she cried. "Ah, Rita, what would my mother say if she knew all this?"

The beautiful face into which she gazed grew suddenly pale.

"Daisy," said Rita, "you startle me with your raptures, and my head aches to-day."

"You have altered, Rita," said the young girl. "You are beautiful as a picture, sister dear! Ah, it gladdens my heart to see you here! Jewels and rich dresses suit you well; you are like a rare gem in a wonderful setting! Is not Lord Lisle very proud of you?"

They talked long. Daisy had much to tell—of the kindness she had met with from her friends; how deeply they deplored her leaving them; of her unbounded happiness at the thought of living with Rita in this beautiful home.

Rita said less. She spoke of the year they had spent in Paris; of her lessons; of her masters; of Mrs. Marche; of Lord Lisle; but she never even named Philip, or spoke of herself.

"You must be very happy," said Daisy, at length; "but the happiest thing of all is to have found some one to love you. I would give all this a hundred times over to have my dear mother back again."

Once more the beautiful face grew strangely pale.

"Daisy," said Rita, "you will make me quite nervous if you talk continually about dead people."

"I will not do that," said Daisy, gently; "but my mother is never long out of my thoughts. You have many friends; I had but her."

"I will take you to your rooms," said Rita; "you must like them, Daisy. You have a suite like mine, and I furnished them as I thought you would like best. We will go now, and when you have changed your traveling-dress I will take you to Mrs. Marche."

The two young girls went together through the long galleries leading to the suite of rooms Lord Lisle had chosen for Daisy.

They were beautiful apartments, furnished with taste and elegance. The boudoir contained a few rare pictures and statues, and a magnificent piano; splendidly bound books lay in profusion about the table.

"I remembered your tastes, Daisy," said Rita—"books and music. This piano is a gift from Lord Lisle."

Daisy touched the keys lightly.

"What happy hours are in store for me!" she said.

When they stood in the pretty chamber a cry of delighted surprise came from her lips. It was so white, so light, so elegant—the toilet-table, with its costly ornaments, the long mirrors, the white lace draperies.

"Rita," said Daisy, "I am afraid I shall wake up and find this all a dream. Who would have thought, four years ago, that we should exchange the little cottage at Queen's Lynne for a home like this?"

Then Rita closed the door quietly, and stood before her sister.

"Daisy," she said, gently, "pardon me if I venture to say something to you. Try to forget Queen's Lynne. Do not get into the habit of speaking about it. Lord Lisle has suffered so much during the past that any allusion to it pains him. Take my advice, dear sister; even when he wishes to talk of it do not let him—turn the subject adroitly. It does him infinite harm. Will you try and remember?"

"Yes," said Daisy; "I will not forget it. But just own to me, Rita, now that we are alone, is it not strange that our lives should have changed so entirely?"

"It is very strange," she replied; "and now, Daisy, I will leave you to dress. I will send my maid; to-morrow you will have one of your own."

Under any other circumstances Rita would have been very proud of her dainty, delicate sister. She looked like a sweet, fragile flower. She had chosen a dress of rich white crêpe; the golden hair rippled over her neck and

shoulders in sunny waves. She had no jewels. One white rose lay in the bright hair, and another was placed in the bodice of her dress.

Mrs. Marche looked up in surprise as the beautiful vision came into the room.

She welcomed Daisy warmly; but there was a puzzled look upon her face as she did so. Hours afterward, while Daisy sung in the evening gloaming, Mrs. Marche went up to Rita.

"My dear Rita," she said, "there is nothing I dislike more than curiosity. Pray pardon me if I ask was not your foster-mother—this young lady's mother—a very superior woman?"

"Yes," said Rita. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I never saw any one so innately refined as your sister. She has every mark of good breeding, and, what is more, of good taste. Look at those little white hands; they are like rose leaves! Look at the delicate little ears, the beautifully arched neck. If I had not known, I should have believed her to be 'descended from a hundred earls!'"

With a sore, envious heart Rita owned the truth of all that Mrs. Marche said. In mere point of beauty and coloring she was superior to Daisy; but she had not the spiritual face, the refined, patrician manner, the indescribable something that has no name, yet distinguishes a true lady, and is seen in one glance.

It was almost dinner-time when the young girl received a message to say that Lord Lisle awaited them in the drawing-room.

"Now," thought Rita, "now comes the real danger. If I escape during the next hour, I have nothing to fear."

There was no trace of emotion on her face as she took Daisy's hand, saying, "I will take you. Remember, we are both to be Lord Lisle's children!"

She entered the room, holding her sister's hand.

"Papa," she said, gazing at him the while, "here is my sister—your other child, as you call her."

There came no sign of recognition into his face—only a kindly smile of welcome. The tender eyes were raised to his. Lord Lisle never understood how it was, but in one moment the golden head lay upon his breast, and the sweet, fair face was wet with tears.

"My other child!" he said, gently. "My dear Daisy, welcome home!"

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD LISLE could not understand how or why this young girl made her way so quickly into his heart. She had not the regal beauty of his child. She seemed all soul. Her fair, spiritual face charmed him inexpressibly. Her voice had a strange power over him; it struck him like the sound of long-forgotten music. There was something about her that seemed strangely familiar.

"It must be from Rita's description that I know you so well, Daisy," he said one day. "I feel as though we were renewing an old acquaintance instead of forming a new one."

She won upon him strangely. It was perfect rest to be with her; little failings, little fits of impatience or irritability seemed to die out, ashamed in her presence. She had a calm, brave soul. The breath of worldliness had never ruffled it; passion or pride had never marred its purity.

Lord Lisle liked to be with her; he liked to watch the fair features bent over books and pictures. He enjoyed talking to her; her noble thoughts and eloquent words filled him with wonder and delight.

Rita saw all this, but it did not pain her. There was no danger in it. Lord Lisle was perfectly welcome to love

Daisy, provided no suspicion of the truth ever entered ~~his~~ mind; and it never did.

In every respect the two girls were on a perfect equality. Privately, Rita managed to exercise a little authority over her sister; and Daisy yielded with sweet, smiling grace. She was too happy for any small troubles to annoy her. She had never thought that life could be so pleasant or so bright. She loved Lord Lisle perhaps more than she had ever loved any one else. No mean thought of jealousy or envy ever came to her. All the luxury and grandeur that surrounded her belonged to Rita and Rita's father; she was grateful for her own share in it, and envied no other.

She thought often of the great contrast between her past life and the present. She never forgot the kindly, homely mother who had striven to do her best. At first she avoided all mention of Queen's Lynne and the faithful, honest woman she believed to have been her mother.

But as time wore on, and Lord Lisle began to find his greatest pleasure in sitting with Daisy, he himself was the first to mention the familiar names.

"You talk to me of Italy," he said, one day to Daisy, "but never of England. Tell me something of Queen's Lynne and your mother. Why do you avoid all mention of them?"

"I thought it pained you," she replied, gently.

"Why should it?" said Lord Lisle, with some wonder. "I hope some day to see the place where my daughter spent so many peaceful years. I hope to see the grave of the generous woman who was a second mother to her."

"Rita must have been oversensitive," thought Daisy; and the subject passed from her mind.

Daisy cared little for the pretty, coquettish countess; Rita spent whole days together with her. She had no longer the least fear; she laughed at the foolish doubts that had disturbed her before Daisy came. Her secret was safe; none knew it but the dead, and they tell no tales.

Daisy and Lord Lisle were thrown much together. Philosophers may say what they will, but there is a strong and mysterious attraction between father and child. Nature speaks in a voice that can not be mistaken. Even to himself Lord Lisle never owned it, never even knew it, but it was certain, of the two girls he loved Daisy the better.

There were tones in her voice that thrilled the very depths of his heart. She had some little actions and gestures so like those of his dead wife that they gave him a strange pang; but he never connected the two, never realized the resemblance in voice or gesture. Strange to say, he never even observed the likeness between Daisy and the beautiful picture of Lady Sybella Lisle.

One morning, as they sat at breakfast, Lord Lisle said: "Rita, I have made an engagement for you this morning, and Daisy will accompany us."

"Is it anything nice, papa?" asked Rita. "I half promised Countess Guardì I would drive out with her."

"She will release you this once," said Lord Lisle; and Rita never thought of opposing his will, although an engagement with her father and sister had no great charm for her.

"Shall we drive or walk?" she inquired again.

"We will walk," said Lord Lisle. "I am going to Signor Cardi's studio; he has been painting a picture for me, and I should like you to see it. I thought of asking him to paint another—Daisy and yourself together."

"We might quarrel," said Rita, with a smile, "if we were always in one frame."

Signor Cardi was delighted to see the two beautiful English girls of whom every one was talking. There were no other visitors at the studio, and Rita resigned herself to what she considered a dull morning.

"I hope you will be pleased with the picture," said Sign-

or Cardi to Lord Lisle. "Of course a copy does not allow of much inspiration; but I have done my best."

Daisy wondered at the emotion in Lord Lisle's face as the artist took the covering from a large picture and held it up before them.

Lord Lisle uttered no word. He gazed for some minutes in deep silence. His dead wife's sweet countenance shone out from the canvas living and breathing. The artist had succeeded well; the eyes were full of tender, vivid intelligence, the lips half parted with a smile.

"It is her very self," he said at length. Turning to Rita, he continued: "Margaret, come here, dear child; look well on this face; it shines now among the angels. This is your mother—my beloved wife."

She came forward and looked with curious eyes at the picture. For once her self-possession abandoned her; she knew not what to say—false words seemed out of place just then.

"I suppose you have no remembrance of her," said Lord Lisle, wistfully.

"No," said the clear, cold voice—"none whatever. I was too young when she left me to remember her face."

Lord Lisle turned to say something to Daisy, and was startled at her appearance. She was gazing at the picture, her hands tightly clasped. Her face had grown white, even to the lips, and an expression of hope, fear, and bewilderment was in her wondering eyes.

"What is it, Daisy?" asked Lord Lisle, feelingly.

"I do not know," she replied, confusedly; "but it seems to me I have seen that face some time; and surely those eyes have smiled at me!"

"You have seen one whose features resemble these?" said Lord Lisle, gently.

"No, that is not it," said Daisy, persistently, yet with the same appearance of struggling to regain some lost memory. "Ah, now I recollect! Years ago I used to

dream of a lady with just such eyes and lips who came to me in my sleep."

Rita listened in silent terror. She tried to speak, but the words died away in a harsh murmur.

"The young lady is imaginative," said the artist.

"No," said Daisy, in a tone of quiet conviction. "Years ago I often saw that face. Do not laugh at me, Lord Lisle, but it seems to me now those eyes are looking at me, and the lips going to speak."

Lord Lisle was startled.

"You are nervous," he said, gently. "The warm sun has tired you. Come away from the picture. You will laugh at these ideas to-morrow."

Did the dead ever speak? Her secret was known to no one living. Could the dead reveal it? Would those pictured lips denounce her, and make known their hidden crime? These thoughts rushed like avenging furies through Rita's mind.

She was slightly reassured by Lord Lisle's calm, unsuspecting look. At length she said: "Why, Daisy, that is an old fashion of yours, thinking about dreams. You have startled me in that way before."

The words were skillfully chosen. Lord Lisle's face cleared.

"You have a highly nervous temperament, Daisy," he said, gravely. "You must not indulge in such fancies."

The danger was over, and Rita breathed again. But Daisy could not so easily forget the impression made upon her mind. The picture came home, and was hung in the grand salon. She spent many hours before it, wondering why that face had seemed to haunt her—wondering what was the secret trembling on the lips and shading the clear eyes.

Philip wrote at length to announce his coming. Rita heard the tidings, and prepared herself for the final struggle. She resolved to win him, come what might.

There was nothing Lord Lisle enjoyed so much as hearing Daisy sing in the beautiful Italian gloaming. When the world was all fair and tranquil, the water rippling in the bay, and the flowers sleeping in the sun, she would sing to him for hours together. He never forgot those tranquil, pleasant hours. Through the long vine-clad windows the soft summer breeze came in mild and warm. The birds sung, and the flowers bloomed. The pure rich voice found its way to the very depth of his heart. She sung simple love songs—where truth and honor always prevailed over everything else—and old-fashioned English ballads. Daisy's singing was like herself, as free from affectation and as simply pure.

One evening Rita had gone with the Countess Guardi to a ball at the Dalgarin Palace. Lord Lisle had declined the invitation, Daisy did not care for it, and Mrs. Marche remained with them.

"You must give me a treat, Daisy, this evening," said Lord Lisle. "Sing some of my favorite songs."

When dinner was over, and Rita, magnificently dressed, had driven away, she sat down to the piano. She knew exactly what Lord Lisle liked. They were in the grand saloon where the pictures hung. As Lord Lisle listened to the sweet, tender music, and looked upon his wife's face, it seemed to him that words and song both came from her.

He was so deeply lost in thought, Daisy so wrapped up in her own music, that neither of them heard the door open nor saw Philip Lisle enter the room.

He stood silently looking on the pretty scene so suggestive of home comfort and happiness. His eyes lingered on the sweet face of the young girl, so spiritual, so tender and fair; the evening sunbeams seemed to kiss her golden hair. The clear rich voice filled the room with music sweeter than any he had ever heard.

"I must have tired you, Lord Lisle," he said at last, rising, and crossing the room.

"No," he said; "I should never tire of that music, Daisy. I have a strange feeling upon me to-night; something tells me I shall soon see that dear face again."

"Who is nervous now?" asked the young girl with a smile.

"Not I," he replied. "While you were singing the 'Land o' the Leal,' a solemn kind of rest came over me. I shall see her soon, Daisy; my heart tells me so. My life has not been a very happy one. I shall understand its sorrows better when I have seen her again."

Before Daisy had time to reply, some one came up to Lord Lisle's chair—a strong, kindly hand grasped his.

"Why, uncle," said a cheery, genial voice, "I never heard you speak so mournfully before. I came in five minutes ago; but the music bound me with a magical spell."

Lord Lisle started up and greeted his nephew warmly.

"I am glad you have returned, Philip," he said. "Now let me introduce you to my other daughter, Daisy—Rita's foster-sister."

He bowed respectfully, and she drooped her shy eyes as he looked admiringly at her.

Almost before she had raised them again, Philip Lisle had said to himself this was the girl he would win for his wife, if it were possible to do so. That was his ideal—the face, the figure, the voice he had imagined and hoped some time to meet.

"Rita is away," said Lord Lisle. "She has gone with your old friend, Countess Guardi, to a ball. Would you like to join them, Philip, or remain with us?"

"Can you seriously ask such a question?" said Philip. "I ask nothing better in life than to stay here. I have many adventures to tell you, uncle. I have been among 'strange islands in glittering seas;' do not send me into exile on the very night of my return."

Lord Lisle sighed. He wished Philip had shown more

anxiety to be with Rita—Rita, who had wept so passionately over the love she bore him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE sight that greeted Rita on her return from the ball was not a pleasant one. Philip sat between Daisy and Lord Lisle; they all three looked very happy, and were laughing heartily at some of Lord Carew's adventures.

She weighed every word of Philip's greeting to herself; it was kind, even affectionate, but there was not that which she longed to hear.

"I do not find Lord Lisle looking very well," said Philip to his cousin on the day following his arrival. "He seems weak and ill. Have you noticed any change in him?"

"No," she replied; "perhaps the climate does not suit him."

Philip shook his head gravely.

"I fear it is something more serious than that," he said. "I can not forget some words I overheard him say to your foster-sister last evening. I do not like the worn expression of his face. The troubles of his early life made him old before his time."

"He is happy now," she said.

"Yes, he is happy," said Philip. "The one aim of his life is accomplished; he has found the child whose loss nearly killed him. Perhaps this may be the reaction after too great a mental strain."

But Lord Lisle did not recover either health or strength, and Rita was the first to propose their return home.

The suggestion was soon acted upon, and by easy stages they were all once more happily gathered within the cheerful rooms of Lisle Court.

The ailing master was pleased to be once more at home—pleased to see his mother's gentle face; but it was ev-

dent to all who knew and loved him that Lord Lisle had not long to live. The knowledge of this brought a keen, sharp pang to Daisy's heart; to Rita it gave a sense of relief that she could hardly define.

For many long weeks after their return they watched him fade slowly and surely. There came to him no violence of pain; life and strength ebbed gently away. The most learned physicians in England stood by his bedside and did battle with grim King Death. But he was not to be baffled; he had marked his prey. During those long, sad autumn weeks two events happened. Philip Lisle fell deeply in love with Daisy; and Rita found that without him life and all it held was empty and dreary.

Has nature no voice—no keen, unerring instinct? What was it drew Daisy, hour after hour, to that sick-bed? Lord Lisle took all his medicine and all his food from her, Rita looking on with calm indifference. She was his acknowledged daughter and heiress. All matters of love and sentiment were of no consideration.

Daisy stole gently into his room, and watched while he slept. Daisy sought the rarest fruit, prepared the richest cordials. As his strength declined, and the long night hours brought but little rest, she sung, in that low, clear voice, the songs he loved, and hushed him to rest.

When death came very near it was Daisy who knelt by his side and said the prayers her mother taught her; it was she who read sweet, solemn words, full of rest, peace, and hope.

And then, in her heart, Lord Lisle's mother would wish this fair, gentle girl were her son's child, instead of the proud, haughty beauty who looked on so calmly while he suffered.

Death was drawing nearer. One night Daisy, watching by Lord Lisle's side, read to him until his eyes closed and he fell asleep. She dreaded awakening him. The gray autumn evening closed in; the fire-light danced fitfully in

strange shadows on the walls; the lamp stood upon a table near, but she would not move lest the sound should wake the sick man.

He slept calmly for some short time, then a moaning cry came from his lips. She bent over, whispering some gentle words, laying her hands upon the damp brow. She was startled to find his eyes wide open and fixed upon her face.

"Margaret," he said, "are you come to me at last? My darling wife, I have pined and died for you!"

"You are dreaming," said Daisy, gently. "Do you not know me? I am Daisy Rivers."

A gleam of recognition at once came into his eyes.

"Who was it whispered to me?" he asked. "It was not you; it was Margaret—my wife. I knew her voice. It was just the same tone in which she bade me farewell. Ah, Daisy, you did not see her, but she has been near me."

Nor could she convince him to the contrary. Believing it to be the delusion of a dying man, she did not contradict him.

"She has been near me," he said, "and I heard her voice. Before the sun sets to-morrow I shall have joined her. Daisy, call my mother, and tell Philip I want to see him now, at once!"

Daisy was alarmed at the gray pallor that fell over his face.

In a few minutes Mrs. Wyverne was by his side, and Philip soon joined her.

"Mother," he said, "my wife has been to summon me. Do not leave me again. I want to see Philip quite alone. Come back after that, and bring Rita with you."

They were left together—the prematurely old man, whose life was rapidly closing, and his young heir, whose future lay all before him.

Philip knelt by his uncle's side. The bright, dying eyes were fixed intently upon his face.

"Philip," said Lord Lisle, "you are my heir, and I have loved you dearly, as though you had been my own son. You care much for me, I believe. Living, I have been kind and indulgent to you; dying, I ask from you a favor. Grant it, and my blessing will follow you through life. Refuse it, and I shall die unhappy."

"My dear uncle," cried Philip, "I would do anything for you."

"Remember your words," he continued, with a faint smile. "I shall put them to the proof. I ask you to do what some men would be proud, beyond all words, to do. Philip, when I am dead and buried—when the time for mourning is past and gone, will you promise me to marry my darling Rita?"

In the hushed silence of that room the words fell clear and distinct; they smote Philip Lisle like the blow of a sharp sword. How could he marry Rita when he loved Daisy with all his heart?

"She is very beautiful," continued Lord Lisle, wistfully, "and very clever. She will be my heiress. What more can you want, Philip?"

What more? The words sounded like bitter sarcasm. Trying to recover himself, Philip said:

"But, my dear uncle, it is quite possible, you know, that Rita may not be willing. She may care for some one else."

"Ah, no!" said Lord Lisle. "Bend lower, Philip; let me whisper something to you. People see things more clearly when they come to die. Philip, my daughter loves you. I know it. One day I found it out. She wept bitterly when you seemed indifferent to her. In her passion of grief, she cried out that she loved you better than her life."

"Is it possible?" cried Philip Lisle, in astonishment.

"It is true," replied Lord Lisle. "I tell you her secret. You are a Lisle and a gentleman; it is safe with

you. I know how those of my race love, how fatally and how well. Lying here on my death-bed, my daughter's secret troubles me. She has not been very happy, poor child! Oh, Philip, make it up to her! Promise to love and care for her. Promise to make her your dear, honored wife!"

But Philip had no words. With those pleading, dying eyes fixed so wistfully upon him, he could sooner have plunged a sword in his own heart than have said "No." Still he did not love her, and never could.

"For her dead mother's sake!" pleaded the faint voice. "Let me be able to say, when I meet her, that our child is happy."

Still no answer came from Philip. There was a fierce struggle in his heart, a mighty tumult that bereft him of all words.

Suddenly, upon his hands, he felt warm tears fall, and the pale lips quivered like the lips of a grieving child.

"My only child, Philip!" said Lord Lisle; "my only one!"

Old and sorrowful, weeping and dying, Philip could not withstand it. Had Lord Lisle asked for his life then, he would have given it more cheerfully by far than he gave the promise that wrecked the happiness of his life.

"Hush, my dear uncle," he said; "it shall be as you wish. I promise to make Rita my wife."

A look of relief and pleasure passed over the dying face.

"God bless you, my dear boy!" he said. "I shall die happy now! I leave my darling in good hands. You will be kind to Daisy," he continued; "let her live here with my mother until she marries."

"I will be kind to Daisy," said Philip, hoarsely. He had not the courage to refuse his uncle's last wishes; he could not turn a deaf ear to the faint, pleading voice, yet the giving of that promise made him so wretched he would

gladly have changed places with the man whose last hour had come.

At Lord Lisle's wish he summoned Rita and Mrs. Wyverne.

"Rita," said Lord Lisle, "let me speak to you while I have strength. Philip will tell you all we have arranged. You are to be his wife, my darling."

Philip never forgot the startled joy and happiness that came into her face; it was a new revelation to him.

"Take her in your arms, Philip," said Lord Lisle; "tell her you will fill my place."

Philip bent over his cousin; her beautiful face, softened and full of tenderness as he had never seen it before, was raised to his; he touched her brow with his lips.

"I will take care of you, Rita," he said, gently.

It was not a very enthusiastic wooing; there was no rapture on Philip's face as he looked upon the girl he had promised to make his wife.

Two hours afterward, when the great change came and Mrs. Wyverne summoned Rita, she shrunk from the sight of death. She went back to her room, and knelt with her face buried in her hands.

Lord Lisle died with his head pillowed on Daisy's arm; his eyes, unto the last, lingered on her face. He was confused in that hour, and thought she was Margaret, his lost wife, come to fetch him.

* * * * *

A week of gloom and sorrow followed; the great house was hushed and still; the sunshine was not allowed to visit it; people spoke in low, hushed whispers; for he who had been the loved and honored master lay dead there.

The day of the funeral came at last—a day of pouring rain; the long, black procession wound its way through the dripping trees; even nature seemed to weep as Lord Lisle was laid down to rest.

After the funeral was over the will was read in the

library. The three ladies were summoned; Mr. Kent, the lawyer, and a few friends of the family, were there. It was a just and equitable will, leaving, as a matter of course, to Philip the entailed estate of Lisle Court and the income derived from it. To his dearly loved child, Margaret Lisle, was bequeathed the three estates of Helsmeir, Endsleigh, and Thorne. To his mother the late lord left a handsome income, and the same to Daisy. The annuity paid to Mrs. Ferne and Mrs. Markham was to be continued. All old servants and dependents were remembered.

As she listened to the lawyer's monotonous tones, Rita sat like one in a dream. The end and aim of her life was accomplished. Her fraud had succeeded; there could be no more danger—no more fear of discovery.

There was much to arrange. At Lord Lisle's urgent request Mrs. Wyverne consented to remain for some time, at least, at Lisle Court. Rita and Daisy were to remain with her. Philip himself had business in Scotland, and, when all plans were settled to everybody's satisfaction, he went there.

After the year of mourning had passed it was Mrs. Wyverne's intention to take the two young girls to London for the season. It was high time that Rita made her *début*; she was to be presented at the birthday Drawing-room, and the elder lady predicted for her beautiful grandchild a series of brilliant triumphs.

When the time came, Daisy, much to Mrs. Wyverne's surprise, steadily refused to make any grand *début* in the gay world.

"I will go to London with you, dear madame," she said. "The truth is, I could not bear to be parted from you; but I think it would be absurd for me to attempt to share the honors and privileges that are Rita's by right of birth. It is only through Lord Lisle's bounty that I am

even what I am. I have no claim to more. I do not forget that I am of lowly birth and station."

Rita, who heard her sister's reasons, said no word. In her heart she was pleased to be saved from the continual presence of one whom she felt would be a formidable rival.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE London season opened brilliantly. Lord Lisle went to the family mansion in Grosvenor Square. Mrs. Wyverne took a beautiful house in Hyde Park, and went there with Daisy and Rita. Mrs. Marche had left them. The three ladies were very happy together. Daisy was the sunbeam; her sweet, unselfish disposition, her gentle patience and interest in others never seemed to fail. She listened to Rita's egotistical conversation, and never wearied. She was Mrs. Wyverne's confidante; and Philip, Lord Lisle, despite his promise, thought the day dark that passed without one glimpse of her.

Yet Daisy had her trials. Before Lord Lisle's illness and death, she had, in some vague, dreamy way, begun to think that Philip cared very much for her. He never seemed to forget her; he had talked to her more than to any one else; his face wore a different look when she was near him; and once—she had never forgotten the day—after singing to to him for some time, he caught her hand and kissed it.

"Daisy," he said, "I hope your voice will be the last sound I shall hear on earth."

She was not vain, but many little things had happened which made her think that Philip loved her. He had not said so in words, but his eyes had told some passionate love tales. Modest and gentle, she had treasured these things in her own heart. Daisy was not one to love unsought; there was a quiet dignity hidden under her affectionate manner and graceful, winning way. She was capa-

ble of loving deeply as her sister, but in a different way. Rita would have schemed, planned, and maneuvered to win the one she loved. Daisy would have buried her secret and remained true to it all her life.

Vague, happy thoughts of what might be came to her—sweet, girlish dreams, in which Philip took the greatest share. They were never of rank or position—never of grandeur or riches—but of him.

On the night of the late lord's death she stood by when the engagement was announced, and heard the words—"Rita is to be Philip's wife." In her pure humility, she felt no surprise. After all, it was right and natural that Philip should prefer his beautiful cousin to one so lowly as herself. So the pretty dream was dispelled—the bright, vague hopes that had thrilled her heart were buried. If she suffered, no one knew it. She listened to Rita's plans for the time when she should be Lady Philip Lisle, and wondered at what she thought her own vain folly.

The sun shone brightly one May morning. London was unusually gay. The tall trees in the parks were green and full of leaves; the birds sung in the branches; crowds of gayly dressed people filled the wide streets. There was a subdued murmur in the air; the roll of carriages, the sharp ring of horses' feet, the pealing of church bells, and the bands of music in the squares.

In a superbly furnished drawing-room Mrs. Wyverne sat on that May morning with Miss Lisle. It was the day after her presentation, and the two ladies were discussing the triumph she had won. Every one agreed no such *débutante* had been seen for years; the beautiful southern face, the dark, lustrous eyes and profusion of black hair were rare among the daughters of England. Even royal lips had spoken in praise of her magnificent loveliness.

The gay world followed its leaders; before that day came to an end Miss Lisle was established the belle of the season.

Her triumph exceeded her fondest—nay, most sanguine dreams.

On the following morning the breakfast-table was half covered with cards—invitations for balls, soirées, and parties. Daisy laughed, and a flush of grateful vanity crimsoned Rita's face.

“I told you so, my dear,” was Mrs. Wyverne's comment. “I wish your father had lived to see this day; he would have been proud of it.”

Among other invitations was one from Lady Carlyon—the queen *par excellence* of the fashionable world. She was one of the prettiest and most popular women in London, and at the same time so exclusive that to belong to her set, to have the *entrée* to her house, was a stamp and seal of superiority.

Lady Carlyon always gave a ball directly after the Drawing-room. It was a glean of beauty, fashion, and talent. She had procured an introduction to Mrs. Wyverne and Miss Lisle, foreseeing, with her usual shrewdness, that a new star had arisen on the great world.

Rita held the pretty card of invitation in her hand when Lord Lisle entered the room. He smiled at the quantity of notes.

“Lady Carlyon!” he said, in answer to some remark of Mrs. Wyverne's. “Wherever else you may go, or whatever you may forego, you must go there. She is the most exclusive woman in London, and gives the best balls. One meets all the best people there. If you make an effective appearance at Lady Carlyon's, Rita, your success in society is certain. When is the ball?”

“On Thursday night,” she replied.

“You should go to Madame Durrand's at once,” he replied. “I called to ask if you would go to the opera this evening.”

Daisy raised her head suddenly at this question, and Philip caught a wistful glance of the violet eyes.

"You would like it," he said, gently.

"Better than anything in the world," she said. "I know all the music of 'Trovatore,' but I never heard it sung."

"We will go this evening," said Mrs. Wyverne, good-naturedly; "of course you will join us, Philip?"

"I intended doing myself that pleasure," he replied, with a smile.

"Why should he not have that one gleam of happiness?" he asked himself. "The time must inevitably come when Daisy would leave them; sooner or later, some happy man would discover the full value of this fair pearl, and win it for himself. Surely, from a life-time of sacrifice, he might snatch one hour's brightness, and sit by Daisy's side, and look in her pure, fair face without wrong?"

Lord Lisle was proud of the ladies he escorted. Rita wore a superb dress of sheeny, gleaming white and gold; rich rubies flashed from the coils of dark hair and shone upon her neck and arms. Daisy looked fresh and fair as a spring morning; her dress of white lace had no ornament save the pretty violets that looped it up. Purple violets nestled in the ripples of golden hair. She carried a bouquet of the same sweet flowers in her hands. In personal beauty she was inferior to Rita, but Rita lacked the graceful patrician manner that characterized her sister.

Philip was charmed beyond all prudence. He sat by the side of the woman he had promised to marry, looking at the girl he had so fervently loved.

Mrs. Wyverne's box was the great center of attraction that evening. No one was so captivated by Rita as Captain Darcy. He was introduced to her by Lord Lisle as one of his friends, and at the first glance of her eyes fell a victim to their light—fell, without any hope or chance of recovery, fathoms deep in love.

Philip looked on with quiet amusement. Ah, if it could

only be so! If Rita were free, and he were free! If he might woo that fair, gentle girl for his wife, life would recover its lost charm! It was too late for such dreams! The die was cast—his honor pledged! Let his heart ache ever so much, he must marry Margaret Lisle!

But for this one evening he yielded himself to the charm. Captain Darcy rushed on to his fate, lingering by Rita, while Philip talked to Daisy.

How fair and pure she was! The delicate bloom in her face, that deepened at his every word; the tender radiance of those clear eyes; the perfume of the violets she carried had some secret, subtle charm for him. For many long months afterward that same perfume struck him with a sense of pain.

It must end. Lord Lisle left Daisy with a deep sigh, and a shadow on his bright face. Mrs. Wyverne heard the sigh, and saw the look, but misunderstood both.

She pitied Philip, and thought him jealous of Captain Darcy. Until the opera ended she sat making up her mind that on this very evening she would speak to him, as she had long intended to do.

"Call to-morrow morning, Philip," she said, as Lord Lisle left them; "I want to see you particularly."

Going home that evening Philip made some excellent resolutions. He loved Daisy; how could he help it? But he would not break his promise. For the future he would avoid her; her presence had a fascination for him that no words could describe. From this evening he would avoid her, and keep his honor intact.

Mrs. Wyverne received Lord Lisle in her own room, giving orders that she was at home to no one else.

"Philip," she said, "be seated. I shall detain you some time. What I have to say is important. Have you decided when your marriage with Rita is to take place?"

The question came to him like a sharp blow; for one half moment it unnerved him.

"I have not thought about it yet," he said; "there is no immediate hurry, I suppose?"

"No," she replied; "but your engagement should be made known. It will save many disappointments and much mortification. That poor Captain Darcy fell quite in love last night with Rita."

"She did not seem to reciprocate it," he said, with a smile.

"No," replied Mrs. Wyverne; "Rita sees, hears, and cares for no one but yourself."

Which information would have been pleasant enough had Philip been of the same mind.

"It should be made known at once; and I think, unless you see any obstacle, that the marriage should take place at the end of the season. Any longer delay would be useless."

Ah! useless, indeed. No delay could avert his fate. Let the blow fall quickly.

"Whenever you wish, madame," he said, wearily.

She looked up in wonder at his tone.

"Your own wish must dictate to you," she said, "not mine. I merely advise the autumn. Do you think that time will suit?"

"I see no objection to it," said Philip.

"Then you had better speak to Rita about it. She is not in now; but if you like to call this evening we shall be all pleased to see you."

"I have an engagement this evening," he replied. "I shall meet you all at Lady Carlyon's to-morrow evening, and I will mention it to her then."

As Philip closed the door behind him, thankful the interview was ended, Mrs. Wyverne sighed deeply.

"I can not understand them," she said—"these men of the present day. What an unfortunate love affair my poor son's was, and here is Philip—he talks of love and marriage far more coolly than he would of a new picture!

I can not understand it. Surely the ancient spirit of chivalry must have died away?"

As Lord Lisle was leaving the house he met Daisy just coming in from the garden. Her hands were full of pretty flowers; she herself looked like their queen.

"What is the matter, Lord Lisle?" she asked, looking at his sad, tired face. "Have you heard bad news?"

"No, Daisy," he replied, taking the flowers from her hands and clasping the little fingers in his own. "Help me to be very brave. I have sorrow to bear; tell me how to bear it."

"Bravely!" she said, her face glowing with light—"bravely, as great men and great heroes do!"

"I am no hero," he said, sadly.

"Any man is a hero who bears a sorrow in silence and well," Daisy continued—"and there are many such in the world."

"I will try to be one of them," he said. "Daisy, say 'God bless you.'"

She repeated the words, and he left her wondering what had saddened and wearied him on that bright May morning, when every one else looked happy and gay.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I SHALL not see your triumphs, Rita," said Daisy; "but I shall hear of them. Lady Carlyou must be difficult to please if she is not charmed with you."

Rita stood before the large mirror in her dressing-room, and Daisy, with gentle hands, was adding some last finishing touches to her toilet. She had never looked more beautiful. Mrs. Wyverne, unable to keep the secret, had whispered to her that Philip was going to ask her a momentous question that evening, and she had prepared for a grand triumph.

The dress chosen was one that enhanced and increased

her regal beauty. It was of the richest green velvet, shaded with delicate white lace, and trimmed with golden fringe. Mrs. Wyverne had wished her to wear nothing but diamonds; they circled her graceful head like points of flame; they were clasped round her firm white throat and beautiful arms; they suited her well.

Daisy had selected her bouquet; it was of scarlet verbenas and white heath.

"It requires just that dash of crimson to make the picture complete," she said, laughingly.

"You are always thinking of pictures, Daisy," said Mrs. Wyverne.

"Because I love them," she replied. "Now, Rita darling, have you everything? It is growing late."

She took from the table a beautiful fan. The handle was wrought in pure gold. It was made of rare white feathers light as down.

"I never saw any one manage a fan better than you, Rita," she said; "you must have a code for it. Hold that open, my dear, and let me look at you."

Rita opened the fan, and the delicate feathers touched her white neck.

"That will do," said Daisy; "I am quite satisfied with my picture."

"Would not you like to go with us?" asked Rita, complacently regarding herself in the glass.

"Yes, for some reasons; no, for others," replied the young girl. "Now, Therese, the opera-cloak, please; Miss Lisle will be late."

The crimson cloak was thrown over the white, polished shoulders, and Rita swept out of the room, followed by Mrs. Wyverne.

It was a brilliant night. In the dark after-days Rita looked back to it as the crowning hour of her triumph.

Lady Carlyon's rooms were magnificently decorated;

lights shone like stars from costly flowers that rose in tiers, each one more brilliant than the other.

Azaleas and crimson fuchsias, golden calceolarias, magnificent pelargoniums, delicate heath, heliotropes, roses of every kind and hue formed a gorgeous background. Here and there, between the bright flowers, one caught sight of a white marble statue. The whole suite of rooms was illuminated. Leading into the large conservatory, pretty scented fountains rippled there—a large one in the midst, shaped like a huge lily, from which the water fell with a musical rhythm and cadence that soothed and charmed the ear.

Almost the first gentleman who accosted Rita was Captain Darcy. His happiness was complete when he had secured her hand for the first waltz.

She was soon surrounded by her court of admirers. Never had the beautiful face shone brighter; never had the brilliant wit and quick powers of repartee been shown to greater advantage.

Miss Lisle was undoubtedly the queen of that gay throng. Lady Carlyon was charmed with her. Philip could not help feeling proud of her; nor could he help seeing the different way in which she treated him. To others she was charming and gracious in her peculiar, haughty manner; for him her whole nature seemed to change—her face softened, her dark eyes drooped—he could not help seeing how great was his power over that proud, ambitious heart.

As he watched her, the center of all homage and admiration, he felt that she would fill well the place of Lady Lisle. She would do him credit; she would be one of the fairest branches on the family tree; she would receive the homage of all the great world, and it would reflect fresh glory on his name; but, for all that, he sighed when he recalled a fair, sweet face framed in golden hair, and eloquent eyes full of truth and candor.

It could never be—that fair vision must fade from him; he must linger no more by Daisy's side; honor called him elsewhere. Yet that night, when the girl he had promised to marry shone like a peerless queen among her compeers, he would have given title, wealth, rank—everything save honor—for his freedom.

Those who saw Lord Lisle that evening wondered at the strange, gloomy expression of his face. He had a task before him; the sooner it was accomplished the better; he was to ask Margaret Lisle *when* she would become his wife.

There was some slight sensation just after supper. A royal duke, a great admirer of Lady Carlyon, "looked in." His grace happened to be in a particularly happy and genial state of mind. He congratulated Lady Carlyon upon the magnificent appearance of her rooms, and put the final stroke to his amiability by requesting an introduction to Miss Lisle.

Lady Carlyon was delighted. It was the proudest moment of Rita's life. Every eye was turned upon her. She stood erect in the pride of her magnificent beauty, and his royal highness bent before her, dazzled by the light of that wondrous face.

He murmured some few complimentary words, and then solicited the favor of one waltz. The keenest observer could not have detected one passing gleam of triumph in the dark eyes; the snowy plumage of the gorgeous fan did not flutter as she held it against her bosom.

Accustomed to stately beauties and ladies of high degree, the duke, the cynosure of all eyes, said to himself that the *débutante* surpassed them all.

Rita saw the envious and admiring glances that followed her every movement; she knew that the homage of her royal partner would give a stamp and seal to her popularity—would set her far above all rivals. Even while she was in the whirl of the dance, she thought of all these things. One idea was paramount—Lord Lisle would see

how others worshiped her, and it might make him more eager in his wooing.

When the waltz ended, and the duke returned with his beautiful partner to the seat she had left, Lord Lisle was there with Lady Carlyon. Rita's triumph was complete. His royal highness danced no more; during the few minutes that he remained he lingered by her side; when he bade her adieu, it was with a wish, most flatteringly expressed, that he might have the pleasure of seeing her again.

It was a lesson in worldliness to see how she was surrounded then. Yet no one could discern the faintest consciousness of her success. Her smiles were brighter and more charming than usual; nothing else denoted any elation.

Lord Lisle was struck with what he saw. Surely this girl, from whom he would so gladly have freed himself, must have fascinations that he did not understand. All around him people were talking of her; the men in warmest, most extravagant terms; the ladies, with affected candor and ill-concealed jealousy. How was it that he alone of all the world was untouched by her beauty, uncharmed by her stately grace?

"You look rather tired," said Lady Carlyon to Miss Lisle. "You have danced every dance, I believe. Lord Lisle, where is your gallantry? Miss Lisle would perhaps like to walk through the rooms. A few minutes in the conservatory would be refreshing; it is cool and fragrant."

With a silent bow Philip offered his arm to Rita, and they walked through the long suite of rooms.

"Opportunities are given to most men," said Philip. "I had better make the most of mine, as I have a question to ask to-night. I will ask it now and here."

There was no one in the conservatory. Philip placed a chair for Rita near the pretty lily-shaped fountain.

"There could not be a more pleasant place to repose,"

he said. "It is cool, fragrant, and quiet; the sound of this falling water lulls one to rest."

She was gazing dreamily into the rippling water; the music of it took her back to Queen's Lynne. She saw a gorgeous evening sky, a stretch of golden sand, and a sunlit, smiling sea. She saw a dark, handsome face looking in her own; her hands seemed to burn where those passionate kisses had fallen; words such as she would never hear again sounded once more in her ear.

"How he loved me," she thought; "and I never cared for him!"

"Rita," said the low voice of Philip Lisle, "can you spare me a few moments? I have something very particular to say to you."

She raised her eyes from the rippling water and looked anxiously at him.

But Lord Lisle was puzzled what to say. Had Daisy been sitting there he would have simply said:

"Tell me, Daisy, when will you be my wife."

He was too honest to feign a love he did not feel, yet he wished to be kind and affectionate to the young girl his dying kinsman had confided to him.

"Do you remember the evening your father died," he asked, "and what passed then?"

A crimson blush covered her face. Could it be that the one passionate hope of her heart was to be gratified at last?

"I could never forget it," she said, gently; and then a deep silence fell upon them.

"Rita," continued Lord Lisle, arousing himself at last, "I am but an awkward wooer—so awkward that I am astonished at myself. Can you overlook that—will you pardon my abruptness, and tell me when will you consent to be my wife?"

For the first time that evening Rita lost her self-possession; the jeweled fingers trembled, the rich color faded from her cheek and lips.

"That is an important question," she replied.

"Yes," said Philip, gravely. "Do not let me hurry you, Rita. Take time to think it over. Give me your answer when you like."

"I do not require time for thinking," she said; "it is not that."

All that was womanly and tender in her seemed to be aroused; the pride and hauteur died from her face; a light, soft and beautiful, came into it; the dark, lustrous eyes were dimmed with happy tears.

"It is not that, Philip," she said, rising and placing her hand on his arm. "I am ready to redeem my promise whenever you will; but do you love me—tell me, do you love me?"

Lord Lisle felt an uncomfortable sensation, as if being placed in the greatest difficulty any one had ever been in. He could not look into that beautiful face, and say bluntly he did not love her; nor could he feign a lover's rapture that he did not feel. He evaded all reply by raising her hand and pressing his lips upon it.

"There are times," she said, with rare and graceful humility, "when I feel unworthy to be your wife. My life has not been all happiness."

He interrupted her, touched to the heart by that rare softening, and murmured something to the effect that she was worthy to be a queen.

"Ah, no," she said, "I am not worthy, Philip; but if you love me, if I am your wife, I will try as I have never done before; and you will help me?"

Lord Lisle was only mortal. The beautiful pleading face so near his own; the dark, lustrous eyes swimming in tears; she so proud to others, courted, flattered, and admired. He clasped her in his arms and kissed the tears away.

"I will do my best," he said, gently, "to make you happy, Rita. Tell me—when will you be my wife?"

They stood by the little fountain, whose pretty, rippling waters told nothing of the dread tragedy even then looming in the distance, and they talked of the marriage that was to take place when the summer flowers had ceased to bloom, and the autumn leaves were falling.

CHAPTER XX.

ON arriving home on that eventful night, Rita hurried to her own chamber. She required no attendance—she longed to be alone. During the whole evening she had exercised marvelous self-control. She had seen herself queen of the most brilliant throng in London. Men whose names were historical had vied with each other who should pay the most flattering homage to her—royal lips had complimented her; and then came the crowning triumph—Lord Lisle, whom she loved with all the strength of her ambitious nature, had asked her to say when she would be his wife. All this had happened—the very depths of her heart had been stirred. Now she wanted to be alone to think it over.


The wax tapers were lighted on the sumptuous toilet-table—a cosy easy-chair was drawn up to it. Rita fastened the door, and seated herself before the large mirror.

The future lay before her—one path of roses. There was not a thorn to be seen in it—not a cloud in the bright sky that smiled upon her. In a few short months the dearest wish of her heart would be gratified—she would be Lady Lisle.

“He loves me,” she said to herself; “and in time to come he will worship me.”

There came to her no memory of the deep, passionate love that had once been hers.

“After all,” she said to herself, “it has prospered. What an old woman’s tale all that nonsense about evil and good is! I have made the most of circumstances—the



most of my beauty. I have trampled underfoot all that the world calls honor and truth. What am I the worse? Why need I have feared what fools call retribution? I have prospered. Evil has been my good. There is no more a shadow of danger to fear. Henceforward my life will be a series of triumphs one more brilliant than the other. All the world shall know and talk of the beautiful Lady Lisle!"

Her eyes wandered from her own face to the shining diamonds. Suddenly they fell upon a white, folded paper lying underneath the mirror. She thought nothing of it at first, and did not move to reach it. Not until her reverie ended did she carelessly take up the little note and open it.

Ah, is there no retribution? Can evil prosper? As she reads the bright color fades from her face—the white lips part with a low gasping cry—the jeweled hands tremble—weird, wild horror comes into the dark eyes. Then pushing far from her the shining gems, she—lately so proud and radiant—lay white and crouching upon the ground. Pride, hope, ambition, love—all crushed for the moment by deadly fear.

Yet they were not terrible words that she read. Some would have glanced over them, heedful of the passionate love they betrayed, thinking of the devoted heart that dictated them.

"Rita"—so the letter ran—"I *must* see you, my darling! No matter what happens, I must see you! I returned to England some weeks since—I went straight to Rooks' Nest, hoping, believing, you would be there to welcome me and redeem your promise. Heaven grant you may never feel the grief and anguish that fell upon me when I heard that you, my darling—my promised wife—had left, never to return. In the neighborhood I heard your story—people still tell of the day when strangers came

and took you away. But I could learn no more; **Mrs.** Ferne would tell me nothing of your name or address. To my passionate pleading and prayers she gave no heed. In despair that knows no words I sought for you. There is little need to tell you the clew by which I discovered my lost darling—my wife that is to be. The world may call you 'Miss Lisle;' you may be a brilliant belle, a wealthy heiress—no matter, you are mine, sworn to me by the most solemn vow a woman could take. Had such fortune come to me—were I to be made a king to-morrow, it would not matter; I should value all because you were to share it with me.

"I have worked hard for you, Rita, these three years. I have come to claim you. I know you are true to me, and waiting for me. No fear assails me. Perhaps those proud relations of yours may want some preparation before seeing one who is to take their pride and hope from them. I leave all that to you; only appoint a time and place where I may meet you. My heart hungers and thirsts for one glance of your beautiful face. My whole soul longs for one word of welcome from your lips. Send a line to this address, and hasten the time, Rita darling. I can live no longer without you. There may be difficulties; you must overcome them. Who has a greater right to you than I?"

There was no name at the end of the letter, but she knew it was from Ralph Ashton. After so many years, this ghost had arisen; in the hour of her triumph, at the very moment when she had mocked at fear and laughed at retribution, this blow had fallen, paralyzing her at first with mortal dread.

"I hate him!" she said. "I wish he were dead!"

She tore the letter into shreds, and stamped upon them, inwardly feeling she could trample his life underfoot. Reflection succeeded fear—indignation came swiftly after.

“How had he dared—poor and lowly born—how dare he imagine that their foolish acquaintance was to continue? His wife!” A smile of derision curled her beautiful lips. She was betrothed to Lord Lisle—Lord Lisle, who would thrash this low-born hind within an inch of his life if she complained to him. She must see him—temporize with him—show him the great and impassable difference between them. Then, if he was not satisfied, and did not take his dismissal kindly, she would complain to Lord Lisle.

She began to smile at her own fears. The worst that could happen had befallen her. Ralph had found her out; but, after all, it did not, could not matter. Difficulties had arisen before, and she had conquered them. She should do the same again.

Suddenly the thought struck her—who had placed the note upon her toilet-table? It was not there when she dressed for the ball. Through the rest of that summer night Rita lay in deep, conscious thought—there was no rest and no sleep for her. She must answer the letter. There was no alternative. But see him she would not, unless she was obliged to do so.

She dare not ring for her maid at an earlier hour than usual, lest some suspicion might be aroused. But when Therese did come she looked with surprise at her lady's pale face and shadowed eyes.

When nearly dressed, Rita turned suddenly, as though the thought had only just occurred to her.

“Did you place that note upon my toilet-table last evening, Therese?” she asked.

The young girl's face flushed slightly.

“I hope it was not wrong, Miss Lisle,” she said.

“Wrong?” said Rita. “Certainly not; why should it be? The only thing is I do not understand that kind of thing, and should much prefer letters being sent to me

through the post. How came you to do it?" she continued.

"The person who gave it to me said it was of the greatest importance. He asked me to place it there that you might see it."

"How came he to do so?" asked Miss Lisle, with haughty indifference.

"I do not know," replied the maid. "The truth is, Miss Lisle, I have met him this week several times. He seemed to be watching about the house. He spoke to me last night; he gave me the letter, and asked me to place it where you could see it."

"It is strange," said Rita, calmly. "Is he a gentleman, Therese?"

She could not resist the question; she was so anxious to hear the maid's reply.

"No; I should not say he was a gentleman, miss," was the candid reply; "but he seemed to be a very respectable, nice-looking young man."

"I do not blame you this time," said Miss Lisle; "but remember never to take the same liberty again, Therese. If—if that person should ever ask you to give me another letter, pray tell him the post-office is the proper channel for begging letters of all kinds."

Therese thought herself only too fortunate to escape any further anger from her imperious young mistress. She said nothing of the handsome, haggard face and imploring eyes, or the gold which found its way from Ralph's open hand to her pocket.

Rita did not go down to breakfast. She shrunk from the ordeal of hearing remarks and comments over her pale face. She ordered some tea to be brought to her, resolving before anything else to answer Ralph's letter.

But Daisy knocked at the door, and would not be denied.

"I know you are tired," she said, bending over the

beautiful, false face. "Therese tells me you are quite fatigued; but I could not help coming to you, my sister. Mrs. Wyverne has been recounting your triumphs, and she has told me something else besides. Let me kiss you, Rita, and wish you all happiness. We were children together. Your pleasures and your sorrows will always be mine! So you danced with a royal highness," she continued, gayly. "Ah, Rita, I smile, yet the tears lie close to my eyes. Who would have thought it years ago? You will soon be Lady Lisle! Surely no life ever had stronger vicissitudes than yours!"

"No," said Rita; "it is like one of the fairy tales you used to admire so greatly. Daisy, my head aches, and I am very tired. Tell Mrs. Wyverne I am going to rest this morning, and do not let any one come near me till I ring my bell."

CHAPTER XXI.

It was a cleverly worded reply that Rita composed in answer to Ralph Ashton's letter. There was not one word which could in any way compromise her. She said nothing of welcome, nothing of love—she never named constancy; but she appealed to his generosity. "She was surrounded with difficulties," she said; "would he be generous and wait—not press for an interview that would cause her to run the serious risk of displeasing her newly found friends and relatives?" She said nothing of the distance between them, but every word betrayed how great she felt it to be.

The letter written, she would not intrust it to any one. With her own hands she carried it to the nearest post-office, wishing as she did so that it might be the last she was ever to write to him.

Mrs. Wyverne came to her dressing-room almost immediately afterward.

"Daisy tells me you are better, my dear, and that you have been out. I want to speak to you very seriously. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"My time is all at your service," she replied; and the elder lady sat down upon the luxurious little couch.

"Your wedding is to take place in the autumn," said Mrs. Wyverne. "I assure you, my dear, the time is short enough for all that we have to do. Lady Hammond has been here this morning, and she tells me that Messrs. Storr & Mortimer have some magnificent pearls and rubies. She says they are more superb than anything she ever saw. I have been thinking that as I intend to give you jewelry, we can not do better than drive there at once, and if they please you you can select what you will. You must choose your own design for the setting. Have you any engagement which will prevent you from going with me?"

"None," she replied, gently; but Mrs. Wyverne wondered why the beautiful face looked so strangely white and sad.

"Daisy is going with us," she continued. "I asked her purposely; she has exquisite taste in all such matters. The carriage will be round in ten minutes; will you hasten to dress?"

The sun shone brightly, and the streets were crowded with gayly dressed people; yet on Rita's heart there seemed to linger a heavy weight of dread and presentiment. All pleasure was spoiled by the miserable memory of Ralph Ashton.

Mrs. Wyverne and Daisy both thought their companion silent and dull.

Ah, me, the gorgeous jewels spread out before her! Diamonds that looked like living jets of flame; rubies glowing like hearts of fire; emeralds green and bright; opals with wondrous changing tints; and pearls that glimmered and glittered like dew-drops with the sun shining in them.

At any other time those proud, dark eyes would have lighted up with gratified vanity. Now she glanced listlessly over them. While Mrs. Wyverne admired the rubies, and Daisy hung enchanted over the pearls, she was thinking *how* could she get rid of Ralph Ashton.

"Rita," said Mrs. Wyverne, suddenly, "you seem very absent. What are you thinking about?"

The question alarmed her; she must arouse herself, or they would suspect. With a strong force of her iron will she drove back the haunting fear and applied herself to the task of choosing from among the magnificent gems before her.

Little they thought who watched the slender, white fingers that touched the shining jewels, what deadly thoughts of hatred were passing through her heart. Mrs. Wyverne gave her *carte-blanche*, and Rita selected rubies and pearls that a princess might have envied. She chose the most gorgeous settings; and Daisy smiled as she thought how well these rare jewels would become her sister's queenly beauty.

"You will have the finest jewels in London, Rita," said Mrs. Wyverne, as they drove away. "And now, if you have still time to spare, I should like to call upon Mr. Ferne. I spoke to him last week about beginning your portrait, and he appointed to-day for an interview."

Rita looked up in silent wonder. Mrs. Wyverne smiled.

"I have said nothing to you about it," she continued. "I want your picture as a surprise to Philip. Every Lady Lisle hangs in the great gallery; you have a double right to be there, as a daughter of one lord and wife of another. I consider Mr. Ferne the finest artist in England. If you are willing, I should like him to commence your portrait at once."

"I can have no possible objection," said Rita. "On the contrary, I like Mr. Ferne's pictures, and shall be much pleased to sit for him."

They found several visitors of rank and note at the studio. Lady Rolfe, with her pretty, fashionable daughter, the young Countess of Eversham; Sir Harry Hulme, and Captain Lionel Verne, the son of the bravest and finest officer in the English army.

Rita saw at one glance how she had risen in popular favor. Lady Eversham, the most fastidious and exclusive of belles, hastened forward to address her. The gallant captain impatiently awaited his turn; and Sir Harry Hulme was busy composing some original compliment.

They withdrew at length, after many protestations of delight at the unexpected meeting, and assurances from Lady Eversham that she should look forward with delight to the friendship of Miss Lisle.

The artist, Mr. Ferne, had leisure then to speak. He listened to Mrs. Wyverne's ideas about the picture; his keen, artistic eye drinking in, as it were, the magnificent beauty of Miss Lisle and the delicate loveliness of her sister.

Seeing how much Mr. Ferne admired Daisy, Mrs. Wyverne introduced her to him. For the first time, Rita was slightly jealous. He seemed to pass her over and concentrate his attention on the fair, spiritual face and tender eyes of her foster-sister.

"And this young lady," he said, turning to Mrs. Wyverne, "I hope she intends honoring me with a few sittings?"

Daisy laughed—a rippling, musical laugh that charmed Mr. Ferne.

"No," she said, gayly. "I think that Fate never intended my face to be hung side by side with the Ladies Lisle."

In after-years they both remembered these careless words.

The time was arranged for the first sitting.

"We must hurry home," said Mrs. Wyverne, then:

“There will be barely time to dress for dinner, and I expect Lord Lisle. Not one word of the picture to him, remember; it will be a charming surprise.”

Lord Lisle thought his beautiful *fiancée* looked pale and tired. He was kinder and more affectionate to her in his manner than he had been before.

The evening gloaming had set in when dinner ended, and Lord Lisle joined the ladies in the drawing-room. Rita had drawn a large easy-chair near the open window, through which the summer breeze came in sweet with perfume. There was an expression of deep thought on her face; the brilliant, vivid coloring had grown strangely pale. Lord Lisle thought her more beautiful under this softened aspect than he had ever done before.

Why did she look sad and thoughtful—his uncle's darling child? Could it be that she had noticed the coldness of his love? The young man's generous heart smote him with a keen sense of pain. There could be no other reason why the woman who loved him so dearly should look unhappy. He resolved to drive that expression from her face. Lord Lisle liked to do anything thoroughly, if he did it at all. No half measures suited him. Honor and her own love bound him to this young girl, and he said to himself that he would trample all else underfoot and make her happy.

He went at once to her.

“You danced too much last evening, Rita,” he said. “It is useless to deny the fact—you are unlike yourself to-day. Shall I read to you?”

“You are very kind,” she said, gently. “Talk to me; I should like that better.”

Lord Lisle drew a little footstool near her, and sat at her feet.

He talked to Rita as he had never done before—of a future when they should be together, sharing one home.

He talked of his hopes and his plans—all he intended to do, and of all his hopes for her.

She listened, and yielded to the charm. Something would happen. Ralph dare not persecute her; he would withdraw his claim, and leave her in peace. For the time she quieted her fears, and Lord Lisle, when he saw the smile return to her lips and the light to her eyes, thought how cleverly he had guessed the cause of her sadness, and how dearly she loved him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE post of the next morning brought another letter from Ralph. Mrs. Wyverne passed it to Rita. A dark, angry flush covered her face as she received it; the common blue envelope—the rude style of address, the clumsy seal, all formed so great a contrast with the elegant letters that came with it.

“That looks like a tradesman’s bill, Rita,” said Mrs. Wyverne, as she passed the envelope to her.

She made some slight remark, then put the letter away. Had she dared she would have torn it into shreds, and stamped upon the pieces; but fear compelled her to read what he had written.

Her heart sickened at the passionate, loving words. “His own Rita,” he called her—“his wife that was to be. Yes, he would wait patiently; but only for a short time. He must see her soon, and hear from her own lips when she would become his wife.”

It was well for Ralph Ashton that he did not see the bitter contempt on the face of the woman he loved. She trembled with angry indignation; she hated herself for her folly in having ever given such a man power over her.

“I must have been mad!” she cried. “Did I sell myself for a pair of diamond ear-rings, and the pleasure of hearing a few flattering words?”

All that day she spent with Mrs. Wyverne, ordering and selecting costly dresses of every description; trying, in the whirl of business and gayety, to forget all fear.

Never was bride or *fiancée* so magnificently portioned. Mrs. Wyverne seemed to wish to lay all the treasures of earth at the feet of her beautiful grandchild. Rita's eyes ached with the glitter and sheen of all that was brilliant and rare.

Could any one be so mad as to think that she would give up all this to become the wife of a man she detested—give up the title she had set her heart upon—give up the position she had longed for—and more than all, the man she loved?

Yet she awaited Ralph's next step in fear. What would he do? Would he force his way into the house and demand to see her? Would he call and ask for her? Would he write and insist upon a meeting? She knew not; she walked blindly, like one upon the edge of a precipice, who neither sees nor cares to see the brink.

The exhibition of the Royal Academy of that year was considered an unusually successful one. The whole fashionable world went to see Mr. Ferne's wonderful picture "Condemned." People raved of its simple pathos, its grand execution, its tragical story.

It was the picture of a young and beautiful girl alone in a prison-cell; a sunbeam coming in through the narrow grating touched her bowed head with its golden glory. There was a tragical history in the beautiful, despairing face. Love that knew no bounds or measure had played in the beautiful eyes now so haggard and wild; love that had yielded to jealousy and led to crime. She did not look repentant or sorrowful, although the life-blood of the man she had loved stained her hand. There was power and passion, capability of endeavor, all expressed in the delicate features. The white hands, heavily chained, were clasped together, but not in prayer.

It was a grand picture; people looked at it and left it in silence. Strong emotion does not always call forth words. There was nothing to be said about it; the story told itself. Lord Lisle called one morning to ask Daisy and Rita to go with him to see the far-famed picture.

"Pray let us walk through the park," said Daisy. "I am quite tired of going everywhere in a carriage. See, Rita, how the sun shines; the birds will be all singing and the chestnut-trees in flower. Let us walk."

"I am quite willing," said Rita, indifferently. Provided she were with Philip she cared for little else.

"You had better make a ravishing toilet," continued Daisy, with a smile; and Rita agreed with her.

It was the first time since the announcement of their engagement that she had gone out with Lord Lisle, and she resolved to do honor to the occasion.

Philip thought he had never seen her looking so beautiful; all details of millinery were lost upon him. He saw a radiant vision clad in rich, sweeping silk, with a cloud of lace falling artistically in all directions. The queenly head was covered with a little gem of a bonnet—white lace again. One crimson flower, glowing like the heart of a pomegranate, lay upon the massive coils of dark hair.

Just as they entered the park Captain Darcy met them. On hearing their destination he begged permission to join the party. He attached himself to Rita's side, and Lord Lisle walked a little in advance with Daisy.

"This is an unexpected happiness," said Captain Darcy to Rita. "I am leaving England, and may not have another opportunity of saying farewell to you."

"Leaving England?" said Rita, indifferently. "When, and why?"

"In three days from now," he replied. "I have exchanged into a regiment going to India. That is when; I wish I dare tell you why."

"You can if you will," she said, interested by the handsome, melancholy face, and the sad, patient voice.

"May I?" he asked. "And you promise not to be angry? Oh, let me tell you, Miss Lisle; give me one kind word and let me take it into exile with me! You can not help being the most beautiful and noble of women," he continued; "and I can not help loving you. Do not be angry, Miss Lisle; I loved you the first moment I saw you, and I said to myself then that I would freely give my life to win one kind word from you. I can not help loving you; but I am a man of honor and a gentleman. They tell me you are going to marry Lord Lisle, and I bow to my fate. I shall go far from you, where I may learn to forget the love that is at once the bane and the pride of my life."

"I am sorry," began Rita, gently; but he interrupted her.

"Do not say that, Miss Lisle; do not let me think I have ever brought one sad thought to you. Believe me, looking upon you now for the last time, I say that I would rather love you, and love you in vain, than be happy with any other woman in the wide world."

He stopped abruptly, and Rita knew not what to say. Once before she had heard words like these—words that seemed to chime with the falling waves and the murmuring winds.

"I ought not to have told you this," he said; "it would have been nobler and braver to have gone away and have let my secret be buried with me. But you will give me one word to cheer my exile. I have light, warmth, and happiness with you; I go out into darkness and cold. Say something to me that I may remember in the years to come."

"I say you are a noble man, Captain Darcy," said Rita, gently. "I predict that there is happiness yet in store for you."

"No," he replied. "I may find peace, but not happiness, Miss Lisle. There comes a thunder-cloud occasionally in the brightest summer sky. Life lies all smiling before you; but trouble may come. If ever it should—if ever you should need a friend with a strong arm and a true heart, will you promise to remember me? I would come from the uttermost ends of the world to serve you."

"I will remember," she said.

And the time came when she would have given much for such aid as he could have afforded her.

"I shall go away happier," he said; "I am glad I spoke to you, Miss Lisle."

He looked into the beautiful face upraised to his with a sweet smile. Suddenly he saw it change; the brilliant color all faded; the white lips parted and uttered a low cry. She laid one hand upon his arm.

"Hasten!" she said, in a voice he scarcely recognized—"hasten on!"

She walked with rapid footsteps; it was with difficulty he kept pace with her. When they left the park and turned down the broad path she relaxed her speed and turned to him. Her face was still white and her lips quivering.

"What is it, Miss Lisle?" he asked, anxiously; "what has alarmed you?"

"A resemblance," she said; "perhaps only a fancied one."

"If any one annoyed you," he said, "I would—"

"What would you do?" she interrupted, with a smile.

"Shoot him," replied Captain Darcy, "without any remorse."

She looked almost wistfully at him. Ah! if some brave man like this would but espouse her cause, and free her from the wretched persecution that blighted her life. If she could but tell him all, and ask him to free her from

Ralph Ashton? But no, she could not share her miserable secret—it must be kept at any price.

Margaret Lisle committed many grave crimes during that morning. She had made, perhaps, the greatest mistake of her life. She had converted Ralph Ashton's passionate love into fierce hate—she had changed a devoted lover into an implacable foe.

Walking with Captain Darcy, listening to the warm, eager words, she had, for the moment, forgotten all else save him. She was looking earnestly at him, when, suddenly crossing the park at some little distance, she saw Ralph Ashton. Her quick eyes noted the dark, handsome face, grown coarse and sunburned, the vulgar, ill-fitting clothes, the large, ungloved hands and showy ring. Her heart sickened at sight of him. She felt nothing but the most intense loathing and disgust.

Suddenly she perceived that he recognized her. She saw the start of surprise; the uncontrollable joy that brightened his face; the quick, eager manner in which he hastened to meet her; the outstretched hand extended in greeting. For once self-control failed her; disgust overcame fear; she laid her hand upon Captain Darcy's arm and turned indignantly away.

Ralph saw it all—the disgust, contempt, and fear that blanched her face; the hasty gesture of avoidance; the hurried manner in which she evaded and avoided him. At first he was stunned as with a heavy blow. The girl who had listened to him on the sea-shore; who had repeated the binding oath in the sunlit garden at Queen's Lynne; who had promised to be his wife when he should return and claim her; the girl for whom he had worked and toiled day and night, after nearly four years of absence, had coolly looked in his face and passed him by with dislike and avoidance.

For some minutes he could not realize it. The shock seemed to have paralyzed him. When he recovered Rita

had passed out of sight, and Ralph's anger was something fearful to witness.

"So," he said slowly to himself, "that is it! She sent me a few sugared words, thinking to put me off—meaning to deceive me. She passed me by; she was ashamed to speak to me before that fine officer! She looked as though she hated me, and I—oh, heavens, I have loved her so!"

Was he ashamed of the sharp, stinging pain that rankled in his heart—of the hot tears that blinded his eyes like falling rain? They changed him; love grew into fierce hate. Margaret Lisle committed that morning one of the most fatal errors in her erring life.

There and then, before leaving the park, Ralph meditated long, and formed the plans so fatal to the girl he loved.

"You will not tell me what alarmed you, Miss Lisle?" said Captain Darcy again.

"It was nothing," she replied; "but a fancied resemblance to one I knew and dreaded years ago. I have quite recovered from my alarm. Let us speak of pleasanter things. Have you seen this famous picture?"

"No," replied the captain. "And if you will pardon me, Miss Lisle, I will leave you here. I will make my apologies to Lord Lisle. I am not in the mood for looking at pictures."

"As you will," said Rita, gently.

"Say those words to me again, Miss Lisle; bid me God-speed on my journey!"

For one half moment she hesitated. Surely the lips so steeped in lies should not utter that name.

"Good-bye, Captain Darcy!" she said. "God speed you. I shall always remember you."

He turned away lest she should see the emotion on his face.

"Going?" said Lord Lisle. "Ah, you soldiers are very

fickle! I thought you wanted to see the 'Condemned'? Good-morning; I shall see you at the club this evening."

"Captain Darcy looks very melancholy, Rita," said Daisy. "Have you been cross, or proud, or inflexible?"

"No," said Rita, with a startled look; "I have been passive, Daisy. That is the most I can say for myself."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THEY stood before the wondrous picture. Daisy's sweet eyes filled with tears as she gazed upon the beautiful, despairing face and the chained wrists.

"The old story," said Lord Lisle, gravely. "Love is at once the greatest good and the greatest evil."

"Abuse of it may be an evil," said Daisy. "Love itself could never be anything but good."

"It is not the master passion of the world," said Rita. "Ambition is greater."

"Do not say the word!" exclaimed Lord Lisle. "I dislike ambition and ambitious people. No word seems to me more harsh on the lips of a young girl than that. I could pardon much to love—nothing to ambition."

These words haunted Rita. He could pardon much to love—nothing to ambition. Oh, if ever he discovered her secret, there would be no pity for her—nothing to plead on her behalf!

That evening, as Rita, dressed with great magnificence and skill, descended the grand staircase, a footman met her, carrying in his hand a silver salver, on which lay one of those blue envelopes she knew and detested.

"A man called with this before dinner, and desired me, Miss Lisle, to give it to you at once."

Rita took the letter with a gesture of superb indifference. There was no time then to open it; the second dinner-bell had rung, and Mrs. Wyverne had one of her grand dinner-parties. She placed it carefully in the pocket of

her dress. No one who had seen her that night would have believed any secret care or trouble weighed upon her. She threw off the stately reserve and hauteur that usually wrapped her like a mantle. No smile was so sweet and winning, no voice so musical, no wit so keen, no satire so kindly as hers. Even Lord Lisle was charmed. He lingered by her side, and when the little party broke up, he touched her beautiful face with his lips.

"That is my privilege now," he said, gently. "Good-night, Rita. You shall be proclaimed Queen of Hearts."

She laughed a low, sweet laugh—her heart beat high with triumph. He was beginning to love her as she wanted to be loved—as Captain Darcy loved her; poor Captain Darcy! who had sailed that day for India, and who was never to look upon her face again.

When she was alone in her own room, when her maid had taken away the brilliant jewels and costly robes, Rita opened her letter and read it.

They were fierce, angry words, such as come from the lips of coarse, angry men.

"She was his," he said, "before God and before man; his by a thousand ties—by virtue of an oath she dare not break—and he would claim her. She had passed him by—ashamed of him before her grand friends; but it was useless. She must appoint the time and place for an interview, or he would call at the house and force her to see him. He would wait no longer—she must prepare to keep her promise, and become his wife. He could force her to do so; and if she would see him, and hear all he had to say, she would see how he could compel her to keep her promise."

There was nothing much of love in the letter. He spoke chiefly of force, and as though he had some mysterious power over her.

A sickening fear and foreboding seized her as she read.

Ah! could it be, after all, that evil brought its own punishment? Could it be that retribution had already begun?

A thousand different plans suggested themselves to her. She would have shown scant mercy to Ralph Ashton had he been in her power. All night, while others slept, she walked restlessly up and down that sumptuous apartment; all night, while the stars shone and the wind whistled amid the trees, while the flowers rested and drank eagerly of the glistening dew, she, fevered and worn, raging with impotent hatred, tried to form some plan by which she could free herself from Ralph Ashton.

She could only think of one thing—that was to temporize with him until she was married to Philip. Once Lady Lisle, she would defy the whole world. Nothing could change, alter, or undo that. Ralph might rage and fume; he might persecute and threaten; but if she were Philip's wife, what would it matter? If Lord Lisle should know of this entanglement beforehand, with his keen sense of honor she knew he would never dream of marrying her; but if he heard of it afterward, for his own sake he would hush the matter and shield her.

Once married, she had nothing to fear. If she could keep him at bay until then, all would be well. She must do again as she had done before—temporize with him. Ah! if she could but go away—go to some quiet, out-of-the-way place where he would not find her until the time fixed for the wedding.

To think, with her, was ever to act. When the early sunbeams peeped into her room, when the birds began their morning hymn, and the flowers opened their bright eyes, Rita was seated at her writing-table, composing, with all the skill at her command, a letter that should pacify Ralph Ashton.

She explained her “seemingly strange behavior,” and assured him that she was longing to see him. But would he wait? She was busily engaged in removing all diffi-

culties. Would he, as he valued her love, wait one week? She would, in the meantime, arrange all for their meeting and introduction to her friends. He must write and tell her if he would consent.

It was a clever letter. Pity that such powers should be so falsely applied. Every word of it was carefully weighed. When Ralph Ashton read it he smiled a bitter, sardonic smile.

"She writes well," he muttered. "A week can make no difference. As I value her love, I agree to it."

He wrote in reply: "I agree to your arrangement. I will wait a week; at the end of that time, if I do not hear from you, I shall call, and not leave the house until I have seen you."

The excitement, the fear and suspense had proved too much for Rita's strength. Daisy, going to her room one hour after Ralph's answer had been received and destroyed, found her lying white and senseless upon the sofa.

Alarmed and anxious, Daisy hastily summoned Mrs. Wyverne and her sister's maid, Therese. When Rita opened her eyes she found the three bending over her, with startled faces.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Wyverne, "what is it—what is the matter?"

"I feel ill," replied Rita—"ill and overdone. Take me away—let me be somewhere quiet and still."

They laid her to rest in a darkened room; they bathed her hot brow in cool, fragrant water, and then retired, to hold an anxious consultation among themselves.

They had noticed a great change in her; her spirits were unequal; there were times when both had seen a wearied, wan look on her face and a shadow in her dark eyes. There could be but one cause for it, and that was ill-health.

Mrs. Wyverne thought the excitement of her presentation, the continued succession of gayeties, the whirl of

pleasure, the never-ending preparations for her marriage had been altogether too much for her.

"In my opinion, Daisy," said the elder lady, "your sister will have a serious illness unless some steps are taken at once. I do not like those dead faints; they show great weakness. I must speak to Lord Lisle."

But there was no need. Rita sent for Mrs. Wyverne, who found her lying pale and quiet, with a strange softening of her proud, haughty face.

"I am glad you are better, Rita," said Mrs. Wyverne; "but I am uneasy about your health."

"It is of that I wish to speak to you," replied Rita. "I have not complained—I dislike complaints, but I do not feel well; I have not been well for some time. I am tired, wearied, longing for rest."

"And rest you shall have," said Mrs. Wyverne, whose heart was touched by the young girl's sad face and plaintive voice. "The best of the season is over now. We will go away for a time—you, Daisy, and myself. Would you like that?"

"Better than anything in the world!" she cried, gratefully. "How kind you are to me! Yes, I should like a few weeks of perfect rest and repose before my marriage—and the time draws very near."

"Yes," said Mrs. Wyverne; "the time draws very near. Where would you like to go? Lisle Court is all in a ferment."

"Let us go to some quiet spot," said Rita; "a place unknown to the great world, where we can be quite alone."

"I know of a pretty little watering-place in Wales. I went there many years ago. It is twenty miles from Swansea. It is very quite and retired. Would you like that?"

"Very much," she replied. "I can not thank you, but indeed I am grateful. Will you promise me one thing

more—promise that no one shall know where we are going except Lord Lisle? Do not allow it to be mentioned before the servants or we shall have crowds of fashionable friends invading our retreat. If you will promise me that I shall soon be well.”

She drew Mrs. Wyverne's face down to her own and kissed it.

“It shall be just as you say, my dear child,” said the elder lady; “even Therese shall not know where we are going until she has left the house. Lord Lisle can keep a secret, so can I. But what a strange, nervous fancy it is!” she continued, with a smile. “However, if rest can restore you to health you shall soon be well.”

Lord Lisle cordially approved of the plan. He had noticed some strange change in Rita, and thought the arrangement a very sensible one.

Daisy was only too happy to leave gay, crowded London.

Nor was Rita insincere. She was really ill, and worn out with the struggle. She wrote another letter to Ralph, telling him she was ill, and unable to leave her room. His reply did not tend to comfort her.

“Ill or well,” he said, “she must see him at the end of the week.”

The indisposition of the beautiful Miss Lisle was much deplored by the great world. She had grown so popular, no ball or fête was considered complete without her. It was a sudden eclipse of the brightest star. Condolence and sympathy, in the shape of cards and letters, poured in upon her. Mrs. Wyverne was flattered, Daisy amused, by the sensation.

Her secret was well kept. No one knew anything of the intended journey. Her maid was told that Miss Lisle was going away for a few days' rest and quiet. Mrs. Wyverne humored every whim and caprice, as though Rita had been a sick child.

Lord Lisle promised to join them soon. One fine morn-

ing, three days before the time appointed for seeing Ralph, the three ladies, attended by servants, left London for Sunbay, a quiet, retired spot on the southern shores of Wales.

At the first view Sunbay was desolate—a wide sweep of waters, and a clear, vast sky. Grand old hills sloped down to the shore. Every here and there a pretty little villa peeped from among the trees. There was no town, no regular streets—no place could be imagined more silent or unknown. It was hidden altogether from the great noisy world.

A nicely furnished house was taken, and the ladies comfortably established therein.

“Will this suit you, Rita?” inquired Mrs. Wyverne, anxiously. “Nothing could be more tranquil or dull.”

“I can not tell you how grateful and pleasant the quiet is to me,” she replied.

It was a luxury to sit still, and not tremble at every ring of the bell or step upon the stairs; it was a luxury to walk out in the broad open day, and not fear to meet the man she dreaded at every corner of the road.

To Daisy it was all a mystery—she could not understand so great a change in her sister Rita, whose life was one longing for pleasure and excitement, to shun every one, and seek quiet. She had never quite understood her foster-sister, who was now more of a mystery than ever.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN a few days after their arrival Rita began to recover herself. The panic of fear and dread that had seized her died away. All now seemed safe and secure. Once married, she had nothing to fear, and every day brought her marriage nearer. It was not likely Ralph would find her. No matter what any one said, she did not intend to leave

Sunday until a day or two previous to the one fixed for her marriage.

She laughed triumphantly to herself. Yes, once more schemes and maneuvers had prospered; once more fate had played into her hands, and just retribution was delayed.

The color returned to her face and the smile to her lips.

"This rest is curing you, Rita," said Mrs. Wyverne.

"Lord Lisle will hardly know you."

"I do not feel the same," she replied. "I think coming here has saved my life."

Nothing happened to disturb her. From London and from Lisle Court, daily, letters told how nearly everything was prepared for Miss Lisle's marriage. The magnificent jewels were on view at Messrs. Storr & Mortimer's; the carriages were to be seen at Hewson's; the *trousseau*, one of the most exquisite and elaborate ever prepared, was in the hands of Mme. Cerise.

At Lisle Court all the more modern rooms had been re-furnished in the most *recherché* and luxurious style. From "rosy morn until dewy eve" Rita heard of nothing but the grandeur and luxury prepared for her.

The wedding-day was fixed for the 13th of August, and it was now the second. Lord Lisle wrote to say that if Rita felt quite recovered, and Mrs. Wyverne would receive him, he should like to spend a few days at Sunday.

She could not allege any excuse, neither did she wish to do so. Her marriage would give her the title and position she had longed for; but she valued, even above that, the love of the man she was going to marry.

She wrote a few lines to Lord Lisle—a few loving words, such as she had never used to him before—saying how pleased she would be to see him. Years afterward, Lord Lisle read those words, and wondered at the love of that ambitious heart for him.

When he arrived at Sunday, Mrs. Wyverne was in the

house alone. Rita and Daisy had gone out for a ramble on the cliffs, she said, and he had better join them.

"Philip," said considerate Mrs. Wyverne, "will you tell Daisy I want her to write some little notes for me, if she will return home at once?"

Lord Lisle promised to deliver the message. In the far distance he saw two girls sitting on the height of a tall white cliff. Lord Lisle never forgot the picture. The two faces—so beautiful, yet so unlike—standing out in bold relief against the clear blue sky, the purple heather spreading around them, and the waves breaking at their feet.

He was true. Even then he would not look at the fair, spiritual face and the golden head that drooped sadly as Daisy caught sight of him. He only looked at Rita, whose beauty was heightened by the bright blush that welcomed him.

After a few words of greeting Lord Lisle delivered his message, and Daisy turned away with a smile. As the house was almost in sight, he did not offer to accompany her, but sat down in the purple heather by Rita's side.

"I need not ask if you are better," he said, gallantly; "you never looked so well. I imagine your illness was a complete overdose of pleasure, Rita. I am amazed when I think of all the toil you fashionable ladies undergo."

She made some laughing reply, and then they sat for some minutes in silence, the sunny, smiling sea breaking with a musical murmur at their feet.

The measure of her content was full. She was safe, and the man she loved better than all the world sat at her side. When Lord Lisle spoke again his voice had changed—there was deep emotion in every tone.

"Rita," he said, producing a small morocco case, "there was one strange omission at the time of our betrothal. I gave you no ring; I have brought you one now; may I place it upon your finger, and will you promise me never to remove it?"

He never forgot the love that shone in her dark eyes as she raised them to his face.

"I will never remove it, Philip," she said, gently. "While you live in my heart, that ring shall remain upon my hand."

She gave a little cry of pleasure and surprise when he opened the case, and took from it one of the prettiest and most costly rings she had ever seen. It was of pure pale gold; one large diamond of the first water was surrounded by small but magnificent rubies.

"Do you like it?" he asked, gently.

"More than any jewel I have," she replied.

He took the firm white hand into his own, and placed the ring on her finger.

"You will never part with it?" he said.

"Never; neither in life nor in death," she answered.

He kissed the jeweled hand.

"Suppose I am very presumptuous," he said, "and ask for a reward; shall you be very angry?"

For the first time in her life she raised her face to his, and he touched the lovely, blushing cheek with his lips.

"Neither in life nor in death!" he heard her murmur; but he had no clew to her thoughts.

So they sat through the long, bright summer hours, talking happily of the future that lay unruffled as the summer sea before them. Lord Lisle saw that Rita's eyes never once quitted the ring. She watched the diamond sparkling and gleaming in the sun. He was touched more than he cared to own by that expression of her face.

Suddenly he looked at his watch. "I must write to London," he said. "I promised not to forget. Will you return to the house, Rita, or shall I come back for you—which would you prefer?"

"I have my book with me," she replied. "The cliff is far more pleasant than the house this warm day. When

you have finished your letter come back for me, if you will."

Her eyes followed him until he passed out of sight; then they wandered to the ring.

She opened her book, but never read one word.

"How kind he is," she said to herself; "how noble, how unlike all other men! Ah, I wish—how I wish I could have won him, and have won all that is now mine, without evil or wrong! I detest wrong when I look at him!"

A strong hand was laid upon her shoulder; a hot, fierce grasp held her hands.

"I have found you!" hissed a low voice into her ear. "There is no spot upon earth where you could hide from me."

She started to her feet with a cry of more than mortal agony, and stood confronting Ralph Ashton.

"I have found you!" he said again, with a sneering laugh. "You weak, pitiful coward, do you think you can ever deceive me?" Ah, me!—the wild anguish of that face!

"Ralph!" she said, at length, in a low, hoarse voice, "have you no pity?"

"No," he replied; "none. I have come to claim my wife, and I will have her!"

"But," she interrupted, faintly, "all that is changed now. Were I still Margaret Rivers such a thing might be possible. You can see as well as myself the impassable distance between you and Miss Lisle."

"There is no distance between us," he said, with a mocking laugh. "Rita," he continued, passionately, "how can you think circumstances can change such love as mine? Had fortune come to me instead of you, I should have laid it at your feet—crowned you with it—not spurned and despised you. All words are useless. I am here to claim your promise. Will you be my wife?"

Face to face with danger so long dreaded, her courage rose.

"No," she said, "never! Ralph, I do not want to quarrel with you, but you must see yourself I could never be your wife!"

"Is that fair-haired aristocrat who sat here your lover?" he asked, fiercely.

"Yes," she replied, "he is my lover—Lord Lisle—and I have promised to marry him. There is some one to take my part, and punish you if you persecute me."

He recoiled from her words. "Good heavens!" he cried; "how heartless women are! Four years ago you said you loved me—you gave me sweet words, sweet kisses—your head was pillowed on my breast—you swore you would be my wife! You took my heart from me, and held it in your hands! Now you fling it back to me, and talk of 'punishing' for that very love you once returned!"

"Hush!" she said, with a gesture of queenly dignity. "Do not remind me of my past folly—I regret it!"

"Folly!" he cried. "Oh, Rita! is it for this I have toiled all these years; is this the welcome you give me? Do you remember that night before I left you in the garden at Queen's Lynne?"

"Hush!" she said again, imperiously. "I will not be reminded of those times; they are nothing to me. Surely, Ralph," she continued, more gently, "you must see everything is changed. I should lose all my friends, my fortune, my position, everything I value most, if I became your wife."

"So your new name, your new friends, your wealth and grandeur are the real barriers between us? I can remove them, Rita!" he said, doggedly.

A look of startled fear broke the proud calm of her face.

"Once, and for the last time," he said, "will you keep your promise to me, and be my wife? Answer me!"

"Never!" she replied; "come what may."

His face grew livid with anger.

"Without doubt," he said, "you love the fair-haired stripling who has supplanted me?"

"You may as well know the truth," she said, recklessly, "I do love him!"

"Then go to him," he said, hoarsely; "go and tell him you are a living lie—a false, mean traitress! Tell him you have stolen a name and a birthright—that you are Margaret Rivers, and no more Lord Lisle's daughter than I am! Tell him that, and in his turn he will spurn you!"

He stopped in the midst of his burning torrent of words, frightened at the white despair that came into her face.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What can you know of me?"

"I know all your pretty plot from beginning to end," he retorted; "and I should never have spoiled it had you been true to me. Even now I will keep your secret if you will be my wife."

She waved him from her with a superb disdain that infuriated him.

"Tell me," she said; "what do you mean?"

He seemed to take a pleasure in looking upon her agonized face.

"I shall be obliged—much against my will—to revert to those past times that no longer belong to you," he said, mockingly; "to that very evening indeed when I bade you farewell, and you took the oath that has so easily been broken."

"Go on!" she said, hoarsely, as he paused.

"I asked you for a keepsake, and you gave me an old book. Neither you nor I knew what was fastened in it."

"What!" she gasped. "Do not torture me, Ralph!"

"I spare you as I have been spared," he retorted. "I will tell you what was in it; proof of the lie you have told and acted—proofs that the golden-haired girl you have

cheated and betrayed is the rightful daughter of Lord Lisle!"

Her face could grow no whiter; its pallor was dreadful to witness. The quivering lips could utter no words.

"I will show you," he continued. "Stand where you are. I would rather trust to a tiger than to a false woman. See! Do you remember the book?"

He took from his pocket the volume she had so carelessly given him that fatal evening. He opened it, and showed her some folded papers lying between the leaves.

"I did not find these until I was far from England," he said—"far out on the deep seas. I little thought then what I held in my hands. Draw nearer, that you may see."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE unhappy girl made one step toward him, her eyes riveted on the papers he held.

"See!" cried Ralph Ashton, mockingly; "this is the first proof of your lie!"

He held toward her a portrait, the pictured face of a little child—a sweet, spiritual face, with tender eyes and sensitive lips; golden curls ran over the little head. Underneath the portrait was written, in a clear, legible hand, somewhat faded:

"The portrait of my dear little Daisy, given to Susan Rivers by her sincere and grateful friend, Margaret."

"There can be no doubt about this, I suppose?" said Ralph, sneeringly. "This face of the child Daisy here is, as any one can see, the face of the young girl you call Susan Rivers daughter. You do not resemble this portrait; your hair never was golden, your eyes never blue. You are, perhaps, more beautiful; but you never looked true and guileless as this child does. I have yet another

proof. Here is a letter written by Lord Lisle's wife just before she set sail, it seems, for India. Listen. She says:

“ ‘I send my darling's portrait; it is just like her. May she grow up fair and innocent as she is now. Call her Daisy, nurse, to distinguish her from your own little Rita—the pretty, dark-haired child, who will be a sister to my darling. Do not let her forget me. When you take her in your arms tell her how I loved her—how I used to kiss her golden curls. I have one with me.’ ”

“ ‘There is more of it,’ ” continued Ralph, “ ‘but you have heard enough. The fair-haired, fair-faced child called Daisy, whose portrait I hold here, is Lord Lisle's daughter. You can sooner deny the sun that shines in the heavens, or the sea that rolls at your feet, than that.’ ”

“ ‘I do deny it,’ ” she said, boldly. “ ‘You may do your worst. I deny it all.’ ”

“ ‘You are clever at plots and plans,’ ” he said; “ ‘others are as skillful as you. You roused a demon when you insulted me. I have been to Deepdale. I did not betray you, Rita; but there are those living there who still remember the beautiful dark-eyed child of Susan Rivers—who remember the strange lady coming and bringing the little Daisy with her. There are plenty who would swear to your identity—and to hers.’ ”

She clasped her hands with a low cry, and he continued:

“ ‘You may brave me and defy me; but, remember, surely as you court inquiry, so surely is your cause lost. The evidence I hold here is too strong, the evidence that can be obtained in Deepdale is stronger still. You will have no chance. You will lose the name, the rank, the position, the fortune you have won—ah! and you will lose that fine lover of yours! Men of that stamp do not wed cheats and liars. How long would his love survive the knowledge of what you have done?’ ”

Not one moment—she knew it; and the truth of his

words struck her like a sharp sword. The ring he had given her gleamed and glistened in the sun. She laid her lips upon it with a passionate cry.

“Now, Rita,” said Ralph, triumphantly, “you see you are utterly and completely in my power. Let us make terms. I do not wish to be hard upon you. I will keep your secret, and you shall keep your home and station if you will marry me.”

She made no answer, and he continued eagerly:

“It will not be difficult to tell this Lord Lisle that I was your own true love years ago, and that I have returned from sea. Tell him you care most for me, and want your freedom. He will give it to you. We can be married then. You are rich enough. The late Lord Lisle left you plenty. We can live upon it. If you refuse to do this—nay, do not turn from me—I will go first to your lover, then to the true Miss Lisle, and tell the story of your shame and crime to both. I will make all England ring with your story. I will make your name a by-word and a mockery to all those who have flattered and praised you. ‘The would-be Miss Lisle,’ shall figure in police reports and in the prison-cell.”

He stopped, exhausted by his own violence. There came no cry from her pale lips. She crouched upon the ground and hid her face in her hands.

“You may think yourself well off,” he said, “if no worse punishment than marrying me comes to you. I am no saint. I would do much to win gold and fortune, but I could not have betrayed the living and the dead as you have done. Let me tell you, in all your insolent pride of beauty, passionately as I love you, there are times when I recoil in dismay and loathing at the thought of what you are.”

She could sink no lower, when he who had looked upon her as a goddess and a queen dared to say this.

She raised her despairing face to the smiling summer

sky. Alas! that crime and evil should have marred such beauty.

"Ralph," she said, gently, "do not deal so hardly with me. You have brought me low; have you no mercy for me—no pity? I can not marry you; I love Lord Lisle."

"You can make your choice of the two evils," he said, carelessly. "I swear not to alter one word of what I have said!"

"Have pity upon me, Ralph!" she moaned. But there was no relenting in his dark, handsome face. He stood over her as she knelt in the purple heather at his feet, and she saw all pleading was lost upon him.

"Give me time, at least?" she said.

"Yes," he replied; "you may have time. You want to contrive more plans and schemes, but you can not. You are in my power. I will give you time, but I will not lose sight of you."

"We leave here soon," she cried; and the anguish of her voice almost touched him.

"Leave when you will," he said; "I shall follow. You may take another week to think of your answer, if you like; but you will not play me false again, for I shall not lose sight of you. Tell me where and when to meet you; I will be there."

"We are going to Lisle Court on Thursday," she said. "Meet me early on Saturday morning, at seven o'clock, in the park. You shall have my answer then."

"I know beforehand what it will be, my proud, dainty beauty," he said. "You will be Mrs. Ralph Ashton, and keep your ill-gotten wealth. You will be my wife, as you swore to be!"

He bent over her as though to kiss her face, as Philip had done so short a time before. She turned from him with a cry of disgust.

"You shall pay for that!" he said, fiercely. "Some people would not care to kiss such lying lips."

He left her abruptly, going with quick footsteps down the cliff.

"I have humbled her," he said, with a sneer; "she will never pass me by again. Poor Rita! I wish it had all been different!"

He was gone, and she stood alone in her anguish and shame, alone in her misery, life all wretched, her hopes all blighted.

"The hour was cursed," she said, "when I took evil for my good."

Philip's ring was shining upon her finger; his words still sounded in her ears; his caressing touch was still warm upon her face, and she would never hear loving words from him again. He must either loathe her as a traitress and most wicked betrayer of trust, or he must look coldly upon her, believing that she preferred that coarse, savage man to him. Do as she would, Philip was lost to her.

From the chaos of thought that surged through her brain, that idea was the only one that came clearly to her. Philip was lost to her. The words seemed to be all round her in letters of flame; the sunny sky seemed falling into the smiling sea. A red mist came before her eyes and blinded them. Without cry or sound, she fell as one dead among the purple heather and fragrant grass.

Lord Lisle finished his letter, and then started out once more to fetch Rita. Mrs. Wyverne met him as he was crossing the hall.

"You will have to use a little more expedition over this walk than you did over the first one," she said, smilingly; "we keep primitive hours here, Philip. Dinner will be ready at five."

He made some light, laughing reply, and hastened on to the cliff. Did his eyes deceive him, or was it only fancy? Lord Lisle felt sure that he saw a man rush hastily from Rita's side—a dark, handsome man, who

walked hastily past him, with an angry, heated look upon his face.

He reached the top of the cliff. He had left Rita not more than an hour since, bright, beautiful, full of hope and love, the diamond in her ring no brighter than the light in her eyes. He found her, white and senseless as one stricken with death, lying crushed and helpless among the purple heather. In one moment he had raised her, and pillowed her head on his breast.

"Rita, my darling!" he cried, "what is the matter?"

He kissed the white face over and over again; it seemed to him, then, that she was like some dying, helpless child.

The dark eyes opened slowly. Ah, me! the world of unutterable woe in their shadowed depths!

"Rita," said Lord Lisle, "thank Heaven, you are better! You frightened me. What is the matter—what made you ill?"

She made no reply, but turned from the kindly, honest face bent over her.

"Have you been alarmed?" he asked, eagerly. "I thought I saw some great, rough man rushing away. Have you been annoyed in any way?"

"No," she said, in a low, quiet voice; "I have been too long in the sun—it has made me faint."

"But Mrs. Wyverne told me you were quite strong again," said Lord Lisle, anxiously.

She looked so weary and distressed that he was at a loss what to think or say.

"I am sure something has happened, Rita," persisted Lord Lisle; "a little warm, pleasant sunshine could never affect you in this way. Has that man annoyed you, and you do not like to say so? I feel certain that I saw him speaking to you."

"You are mistaken," she said, wearily. "Oh, Philip! do not tease me. I am tired; take me home."

He said no more, but a shadow fell over his bright,

handsome face; he felt something like constraint and suspicion creep into his heart.

"Philip," said Rita, "say nothing to Mrs. Wyverne and Daisy; they tease me, and make themselves unhappy when I am ill."

"So you never tell them, and let them think you are growing strong?" he said. "I shall have to take care of you myself. I shall stay here to-morrow and take you to Lisle Court myself."

When Rita came down to dinner there was but little trace of her illness. Jewels and dress hid the anxious, trembling heart. Still, Mrs. Wyverne would make what Daisy called a sensation. After dinner she forced Rita to rest upon the little couch Philip placed near the open window.

"Philip may read to you," she said; "but you must be quiet."

Daisy played while the sun set over the rippling sea; and the birds sung their evening hymns; and Philip talked to the unhappy girl, whose quivering lips could hardly smile.

"You are better now," he said, looking anxiously into her face. "Ah, Rita! you must be more careful; you are not strong. For my sake you must take care of yourself."

She could have cried aloud with the intensity of the pain his words caused her, and he could not avoid remarking the strange expression of her features.

"Are you not happy, Rita?" he asked, bending over her. "Does it pain you to think that your life will all be passed with me? Do you not love me, that you look so sad when I speak of our future?"

"Love you?" she said, raising her dark eyes to his. "Yes, Philip; I love you so dearly, so well, that I wish I could die now, with your face looking kindly upon me, and your voice sounding in my ear!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE sun shone clear and bright in the midday heavens when the travelers reached Lisle Court. Never had the grand old building looked to greater advantage. Never had the woods and pleasure grounds looked so fair.

The birds sung gayly in the heart of the deep woods; the summer air thrilled with their melody; brilliant flowers shone from the midst of green foliage. There were not many fairer or more brilliant spots in England than Lisle Court as it looked that bright morning in August.

It was Mrs. Wyverne's wish that the wedding should take place there. Lord Lisle, too, was pleased with the idea. The preparations for the marriage had been carried on with magnificent disregard of expense. Rita's heart beat high with gratified vanity. Ah, if she could but have thrown the black shadow that haunted her into the background! If she could but for one moment have forgotten Ralph Ashton, and felt safe!

Never had the splendor of this grand old home of the Lisles been so dear to her. The sumptuous furniture, the costly pictures, the wonderful array of gold and silver plate, the numerous servants, the comfort and luxury that pervaded the whole establishment—all this, but for Ralph Ashton, might be hers!

But for him, she, next week, might be enthroned mistress and queen—she would be Lady Lisle—every hope and desire of her heart gratified—but for him!

As she looked with wistful eyes upon the luxuries around her, a deep, deadly hatred rose in her heart against him who would fain deprive her of all. She said to herself that she would rather die a thousand deaths than be his wife. He should never triumph over her. She had found

but little time for thinking what her answer would be. She must decide that night.

Lord Lisle had intended to remain for an hour or two at the Court, then hasten on to London, where a multiplicity of business awaited him. Mrs. Wyverne pressed him to remain for that one night, and he consented to do so.

The wedding so long talked of was to take place in the following week. All preparations and arrangements had been made for the reception of the young ladies who were to officiate as bride-maids, and the brilliant company of guests invited for the occasion.

Lisle Court was in a ferment. French cooks, direct from Paris, had been engaged for the occasion; the whole country-side was aroused and interested, and people talked of nothing else.

"We shall have one quiet evening," said Daisy, after dinner, "and even that we ought to be properly grateful for. I am overwhelmed when I think of all the smiling and talking that lies before us."

It might have been a happy evening but for the white, wearied face of Rita. Lord Lisle looked at her in amaze. When she spoke he detected a ring of pain in her voice that astonished him. He saw her lips quiver when she tried to smile, and her hands clasped tightly when the future, or her marriage, was alluded to.

She did not look like the happy bride whose every wish was gratified. Pale and sad, with a deep shadow in her dark eyes, what had come over her? Lord Lisle was both grieved and anxious.

Rita had gone to the large window that looked into the pretty pleasure garden. A large fountain played in the midst of blooming flowers. Blossoms of every hue and shade were there. The western sunbeams lingered over them. She watched the bees and butterflies roaming from leaf to leaf; she watched the tall trees bending their stately heads in the evening breeze; she watched the smiling

heavens, the rippling waters, and the setting sun with despair more bitter than death in her heart.

"Next week," she thought, "all this would be mine—but for him!"

She clinched her white fingers at the words "but for him." If he were but dead—no matter how he died, provided that she was free!

She started, uttering a low cry, when Lord Lisle suddenly stood by her side and spoke to her.

"It is a beautiful evening," he said. "Are you looking at the flowers, Rita? I must tell Jennings you admire them. He always considers this especial piece of ground his *chef d'œuvre*."

She made no reply. The sense of his words had not reached her. Through the tortured heart and brain one idea ran. She must give her answer to-morrow. What should that answer be?

"Rita," said Lord Lisle, gently, "despite your feverish attempts at gayety, you seem very unhappy. What is it? Have you any trouble? If so, share it with me. Let there be no secret between us. If you have any sorrow or trial, tell it to me. You know I am your best friend."

He looked so noble, so strong and true, that she longed to kneel at his feet and tell him all. Better to meet judgment from him than from Ralph Ashton. The impulse was strong upon her, but she resisted it, resolving to fight to the very last, and in that resolve sealing her own fate.

"Is there anything," continued Lord Lisle, gravely, "in the arrangements made that does not please you? Have you any wish ungratified?—any desire unfulfilled?"

"None," she replied, drearily "If I complain of anything, it would surely be too much kindness."

"Then you are low-spirited and depressed," said Philip, taking her hand. "Ah, Rita, you have no faith. Your future is not an unknown land, but a sunny, smiling path.

I can see no trouble for you; you only want rousing and cheering."

Something like a low moan came from her lips. He bent over and kissed her sad face more lovingly than he had ever done before. In after years he was pleased to remember that. He never forgot the anguish in her features as she laid her head passively against his shoulder.

"If I might only die now!" she murmured, and he saw that her dark eyes were wet with tears.

"Death and you will be strangers for many long years, I hope," he said, believing she was depressed and ill.

But he could not cheer her. She talked to him; there was no music in her voice. How could she either smile or forget, when she knew that Ralph Ashton was keeping his stern watch near the walls of the house, and that early tomorrow morning she must give her answer?

She endured it until she could bear no more; her energy seemed to fail, her strength gave way. The hands Lord Lisle held in his own were cold as marble.

"I am very tired," she said. "I must ask you to excuse me. It is your last night here. I am sorry to leave you so early."

"I can only hope rest may restore you," said Lord Lisle. "If you feel better in the morning, let me see you before I go."

How little he thought, as he looked on her beautiful face for the last time, what the morning sun would see!

Mrs. Wyverne would go with Rita. Daisy was left alone with Lord Lisle.

He was troubled and unhappy for some time past. It seemed to him that something more than ill-health affected Rita. In vain he tried to think what it could be. He had anticipated her delight and admiration at the changes and improvements that had taken place; her pleasure at the numerous and costly preparations made in her honor; but she had looked indifferently upon them all, and seemed to

avoid the subject. She looked like anything but a happy bride.

"Daisy," said Lord Lisle, suddenly, "you will soon be my sister as well as Rita's. Do you know, I am very anxious over her? I never saw any one so changed. She used to be all animation. Now she looks as though life held no interest for her. Have you remarked it?"

"Yes," said Daisy. "Mrs. Wyverne was speaking to me about her last evening. It must be the reaction after all our gayety in London."

"I wish I could think so," said Philip. "It appears to me that some secret weighs heavily upon her mind. No physical illness could have changed her so. Has she any secrets, Daisy? I am soon to be her husband; I ought to know them."

"What secret can she have?" asked Daisy, startled by his earnest manner. "I know of none. I know of nothing that can trouble her, Lord Lisle."

"I am quite puzzled by her manner," he continued. "Why is she so silent, so abstracted, so unlike herself this evening? There is some mystery in it."

He little dreamed how soon and how tragically his question was to be answered and the mystery solved.

Daisy tried to soothe him—to make him forget both irritation and anxiety, but thoughts that he could not put into words haunted Lord Lisle.

"I will see her in the morning," he said, "before I go, and persuade her to trust in me. She was intrusted to me, and I must take care of her."

Mrs. Wyverne thought she was doing a kind, motherly action in going with Rita to her room. She knew nothing of the imperative need for rest and thought. It seemed to Rita that she should never be alone. Mrs. Wyverne would talk about her wedding; about the long train of bridesmaids, comprising some of the fairest and noblest girls in England; of the grand ceremonial and the brilliant com-

pany—all this while Ralph Ashton stood outside the walls keeping watch upon her.

She talked until the unhappy girl grew desperate. It seemed to her that she must cry aloud. Mrs. Wyverne noticed the white, quivering face.

“I will leave you now, Rita,” she said, gently. “I am talking too much.”

In after years she was pleased to remember how she had turned back and kissed the young face so white and worn.

Daisy, too, could not rest until she had been in to see her sister. She threw her arms round her. The last words Rita ever heard from her roseate lips were a blessing and a heartfelt prayer.

She was alone at last, and had time to think what her answer should be.

Did ever hatred and love fight again as they fought that night in her heart? Did ever the pure stars shine down upon one so wretched? Look where she would there was no hope. She was hemmed in with toils of her own making, caught in the fatal web she had woven round herself. If she refused Ralph Ashton and made him desperate, he would go straight to Lord Lisle and tell him all. She knew that he could easily prove the truth of his story. Daisy's likeness to the Lady Sybella Lisle was one proof in itself.

What would happen then? Even if she were spared the prison-cell, she would lose everything—name, position, rank, wealth, and Philip. She, who had reigned a haughty and brilliant queen, would be driven forth from the luxurious home that sheltered her a penniless outcast, mocked, scorned, despised, and insulted by those who had flattered her—she at whose feet the noblest in the land had offered their homage.

She could never live and bear it; she could never endure the loss of all she had sinned so deeply to win.

On the other hand, how could she renounce Philip and

marry Ralph? What excuse could she offer for such a breach of faith? The world she had loved and served so well would disown her. With every preparation made—with guests invited, and the whole ceremony arranged, how could she break off her engagement? Certainly not under the pretext of “an old lover returned from sea.” How could she present Ralph Ashton to a gentle, refined lady like Mrs. Wyverne? No one would tolerate him.

True, if she did so and married him, she would still have wealth; the fortune Lord Lisle left her was considerable; but it would be worse than useless—it would be poisoned by the continual presence of Ralph Ashton.

She would never do it. She could never, after the training of these few years, associate with one like Ralph Ashton. Never again! Life with him would be living death.

No! fate must do its worst. She hated him with a deadly, rancorous hatred. She would rather suffer anything, she would rather die any death than marry him. He should not trample upon her ruined hopes and prospects. From the wreck of her life he should not rise rich and prosperous. Let him do his worst, she would not marry him.

The pale glimmer of the stars had died away, and the gray morning light came into her room before she had made her final resolve. It was made at last; her answer was ready. She looked at her watch; it was then nearly four. She was to meet Ralph at seven. There was some little time to rest.

A solemn hush and silence fell over her. Her answer was ready, and she could not foresee what it would cost her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SURELY the most solemn sleep of all is the sleep of the condemned man just before death. The deep repose that

fell upon the unhappy girl was not more dreamless or still. There was no more torture of indecision; her answer was ready.

She slept until the August sun shone full and warm upon her face. Perhaps the most painful moment of her life was that in which she woke. The first rush of memory smote her like a sharp sword. She remembered all—why she had slept, where she was going, and what the day would bring forth.

It wanted but a few minutes to seven, and she dared not delay, lest, not meeting her, Ralph should come to the house, and an exposure take place before all the servants.

She still wore the rich dinner-dress and costly jewels that she had put on to please Lord Lisle. She did not stay to remove them. A dark cloak flung over her shoulders hid them from view.

What was it caused her to stand for a few minutes at the door of her room, and look back upon its luxurious quiet as upon a lost home? No thought came to her of the next sleep she would take upon the pretty white bed.

Gently and noiselessly she went out into the parlor. None of the servants observed her; no one saw her leave the house, or knew at what hour she had done so.

The morning was sweet and calm; dew-drops still glittered upon the tall trees and the fragrant blossoms. The birds were all awake, singing of the quiet summer beauty around them. From the depths of the wood came the music of rustling leaves and the singing brook. The flowers had raised their bright heads. Nature is never so fair, so smiling, so gracious as in the early hours of the day.

The beauty of earth and sky brought no gladness to her; the sweet, fresh summer wind raised no color on her features. The flowers bloomed and the birds sung in vain for her.

She saw Ralph Ashton standing at the stile that led into

the woods. He smiled at the shudder of hate that she could not repress.

"True to your time, Rita," he said. "But you always were. If I remember rightly, you were often at the trysting-place before me."

She did not speak; she had resolved to hear all he had to say in silence. She would give her answer and take her chance. Never again would she kneel at his feet or ask for his mercy. The beautiful white face was cold and hard.

"Let us go into the wood," said Ralph. "I mean to have things settled this morning. If we remain here, some of those prying servants may see us, and interrupt what promises to be a very pleasant scene."

She followed him into the wood-path, where the tall trees met overhead, and shut out the smiling, merciful heaven. The tall, green grass was wet with dew; pretty wild flowers grew side by side with rare fern leaves. The wind made solemn music among the leafy branches.

As she looked her last upon the summer skies, and went into the deep shade of the woods, the unhappy girl shivered as one seized with mortal cold.

"Not so warm here as in one of my Lord Lisle's hot-houses," he said, with a coarse laugh. "Now, Rita, let us have no tragedy airs. I am come for my answer, and I mean to have it. What are you going to do? Will you be my wife?"

"No!" she said, in clear, steady tones. "I have thought well. I would rather suffer any disgrace, any shame, any torture, any death than be your wife! I have sinned, and I must suffer. I thought to escape—to prosper in my evil deed—but a Mighty Hand has overtaken me. Do as you will: expose me, betray me, degrade me, rob me of all I value and love, I am still spared the greatest degradation of all—that of becoming your wife!"

His face grew livid with passion. Had she seen the fury

that flamed from his eyes she would have fled for her life, but her face was turned from him.

"That is your answer?" he said, in a low, hissing voice.

"It is my final decision," she said. "Do as you will."

"You know that I shall go straight to Lord Lisle, and tell him how vile a traitress he has asked to be his wife; that before sunset you will be thrust with ignominy and disdain from a home to which you have never had the slightest right!"

"I have a right," she said, "that you have overlooked. Even supposing you carry out your scheme of vengeance, I shall but change places with my foster-sister. The late Lord Lisle intended to befriend Susan Rivers' child even as she had befriended his daughter. You will disgrace and degrade me—your power stops there."

The fury in his face would have alarmed her, but she never saw it.

"Ralph," she said, "in yonder house everything is prepared for my wedding. I love rank and luxury; I love Lord Lisle. Make a compact with me. Leave me in peace—leave me to take my own path, and you take yours. I will make you a rich man—rich beyond your wildest dreams. You gain nothing by disgracing me."

"Yes," he replied, angrily, "I gain my revenge."

"You refuse, then?" she asked.

"I refuse. I have sworn and you have sworn that you will be my wife. That vow shall be kept!"

"Never!" she said, calmly. "I prefer death. I have sinned myself, but I could never stoop so low as to marry the man who could trade upon a woman's secret. Do your worst; you can not hurt me much. I will go with you, and look Lord Lisle in the face while you tell your story. I am no coward. When all is done—when your worst vengeance is wreaked upon me—I am the victor—not you."

She was frightened then, for he seized her arm with a cruel, hard grasp.

"No," he said, "you shall never conquer—I will kill you first."

She looked in the fierce, angry face bent over her.

"Ralph!" she said, "you can not mean it?"

As she stood there alone in the silent depths of the woods with that fierce, wild man, Captain Darcy's words flashed across her: "If ever you want a friend with a true heart and a strong arm, remember me."

Ah! if he could but come to save her now!

"I do mean it!" he said. "If I am mad, you have made me so! You shall not leave this place alive unless you promise to be my wife—to go away with me now and at once!"

The hapless girl saw something shining in his hands, and turned to fly. There was a rush—a struggle—a sharp, shrill cry—a shot fired—and the deed was done.

The sun saw it, and still shone on; the smiling heavens did not grow black and angry at the ruthless crime.

Down in the thick, dew-laden grass, crushing the fragrant flowers, she fell, her death-like features hidden by the fern leaves. There had been no time to repent—no time to ask for mercy—no time to plead for pardon.

He stood for one moment stunned by his own act, then he knelt by her side and called her. He raised the white face from the ground and saw death there.

"I did not mean it," he gasped—"I did not mean it! You drove me mad, Rita!"

Down again fell the dead face, and he turned, with a cry that rang through the silent woods—rang up to the high heavens. He turned and fled.

Blind with mad fury, gluttoned revenge, and wounded, outraged love, the air like a red-hot mist around him, he fled from the sight of the dead features that were to haunt him until his last hour.

The birds, scared for a time by the shot, resumed their song; the sunbeams began to pierce the dense foliage and glisten in the dew-drops; the little brook murmured its own story; the flowers gave forth fresh fragrance, all heedless of the crushed heap of shining silk and gleaming jewels—all heedless of the hair stirred by the summer wind or of the white face hidden by the fern leaves.

The breakfast-bell rang in Lisle Court. Daisy was the first to descend. Lord Lisle and Mrs. Wyverne soon joined her.

Philip's first question was:

"Where is Rita?"

"She will be down soon, without doubt," said Mrs. Wyverne. "I have not heard how she is."

"She promised to see me before I went away," said Lord Lisle. "I must go at eleven—it is nearly ten now. We are all late this morning."

No Rita came, and Mrs. Wyverne sent one of the footmen to summon Therese.

The maid came in, bowing profoundly to Lord Lisle.

"How is Miss Lisle this morning?" asked Mrs. Wyverne.

"My lady has not rung yet," replied the maid. "She wished me last night not to disturb her until she rang."

"I will go," said Daisy. "I will remind her that Lord Lisle goes at eleven. Do not wait breakfast for me; I shall stay with Rita."

Daisy was absent ten minutes or more. She returned looking pale and startled.

"Rita has gone out," she said, slowly.

Lord Lisle looked relieved.

"She is all right, then, I suppose," he said, "and has gone for a pleasant early morning walk."

"It seems strange," said Mrs. Wyverne. "Why did she not ring for Therese?"

At that moment she caught sight of the maid's scared

look as she stood at the door. A sudden presentiment of some great trouble seized her.

"What is it, Daisy?" she asked, starting from her seat.

Daisy went up and threw one arm round her.

"Do not be frightened," she said. "Therese is alarmed. Rita has gone out; but the strangest thing is, her bed has not been slept in, and the things laid ready for her to put on have never been touched."

Therese came in.

"I can not understand it, madame," she said to Mrs. Wyverne. "My lady has not even taken off her jewels or her dinner-dress—I can not find them."

Mrs. Wyverne turned to Lord Lisle.

"Philip, my dear," she said, "what is it? See what it means."

"It means nothing," said Lord Lisle, gently. "Rita has in all probability gone out. She is somewhere in the gardens or in the grounds—perhaps even somewhere in the house. Daisy and I will look for her. Therese, stay with Mrs. Wyverne. Not one word of this nonsense before the servants, mind!"

"Tell her how she has frightened me," said the elder lady, in a trembling voice. "Bring her here quickly."

They went to the drawing-room—the library—the state-rooms—they searched the whole house, but there was no sign of Rita. Daisy grew frightened.

"It is all nonsense!" said Lord Lisle. "She is out in the grounds."

He called Drayton and Manners, two of the footmen, and told them "Miss Lisle was in the grounds. Would they go and tell her the breakfast-bell had rung?"

The men went on their errand. Lord Lisle stood by the library window. Neither Daisy nor he spoke one word.

The men were absent nearly half an hour. Neither one nor the other had been able to discover Miss Lisle.

Then, for the first time, Lord Lisle felt alarmed.

“Go and tell Mrs. Wyverne, Daisy,” he said. “Ask her to come up into Rita’s room.”

They all stood there, helpless and uncertain what to do. Nothing seemed out of place. There was no disarray of jewels or dress; the pretty white morning wrapper, with its crimson ribbons, lay untouched upon the chair.

“She has not slept here,” said Mrs. Wyverne; “that is certain. Philip, what has become of my child?”

“We will soon know,” he replied.

The great bell in the hall was rung, the men-servants all assembled, and in less than ten minutes they were dispersed over the grounds, searching for one they would never find in life again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ARE you going with the men?” asked Daisy of Lord Lisle.

“Yes,” he replied. “There is no journey to London for me this morning. I shall do nothing until we have solved this mystery. It may be all right, but I begin to feel doubtful. Go to Mrs. Wyverne, Daisy, and do not leave her. There was a secret, after all, you see, and something tells me that we shall discover it.”

She saw his pale, stern face, and pitied him. Even should all come right, it was not pleasant to have had all this fright and disturbance over the woman he was to marry.

Daisy went back to the breakfast-room. The whole house was in commotion. The rumor of Miss Lisle’s disappearance had spread among the servants, and they were all in confusion. Mrs. Wyverne was lying back, pale and faint, upon the sofa.

“Daisy,” she said, in a trembling voice, “tell me the

worst quickly. This suspense is killing me. Thank Heaven, my dear son did not live to see this day."

"The worst is, that Rita is missing," the young girl said, gently. "Lord Lisle and the men-servants are gone in search of her. All may yet be well."

"Nay," interrupted the poor lady, "my heart tells me differently. Oh, Daisy! if Philip's surmise be right—if there be any secret or mystery, what shall we do? She has been so strange lately—so unlike herself."

Daisy took the trembling hands in her own. She soothed and comforted the grieving, sorrowful lady as no one else could have done.

"Whatever it is, we *must* bear it," she said.

So the long, sunny hours of that morning passed, and there came no news of the beloved one lost forever.

Lord Lisle followed the men into the park. He was bewildered. They turned to him for directions, and he knew not what to say. The sun shone so brightly, the flowers bloomed, the birds sung—everything was bright and gay. What shadow of sorrow or wrong could fall that beautiful morning? There was not a cloud on the smiling summer sky—not a sign in the clear, perfumed breeze.

"Where shall we go, my lord?" asked one of the men. "Perhaps the young lady has met with an accident while walking in the park. Shall we go there first?"

But even as he stood giving his directions, he saw three of the servants running from the stile that led into the woods, white and breathless, calling loudly for help.

He went to meet them. Jennings, the footman who usually waited upon Miss Lisle, came first.

"My lord," he said, "I am afraid there is something wrong in the woods. Something is lying there we dare not touch. Will you come?"

They went all together, leaving the bright, warm sunshine, and going into the cool, deep shade of the woods. The birds were singing in the hearts of the tall trees.

Something—a confused mass of shining silk—lay in the long, thick grass. The wind played with a mass of black, rippling hair.

They drew near with hushed breath. One round, white arm, clasped by a diamond bracelet, lay still and cold on the silken robes. Lord Lisle knew what lay there when he saw that.

{ The men drew back as he went to the quiet figure. He parted the mass of fern leaves, and raised the face, beautiful and still in death.

There was a loud cry of grief and horror; but he knelt in silence, lifting the prostrate figure, and raising the head.

As he did so, he caught sight of the fatal pistol.

“Oh, dreadful deed!” he cried. “She has been murdered—shot! Who can have done this? Run, Jennings, Martin! Get out the swiftest horses! Fly for your lives! Fetch the nearest doctor, and telegraph for more!”

“It is all useless, my lord,” said the butler. “The poor lady has been dead for hours—shot through the heart.”

He saw it was all in vain. A deep sob broke from his lips as he tenderly covered the white face. He did not think how she came by her death. He only felt the bright, beautiful girl, who loved him so dearly—who was soon to be his wife—lay before him dead.

The men went back for awhile; they would not intrude upon their young lord's sorrow. The pitiful sight hidden by the fern leaves brought tears into many eyes.

They made a rude litter of twisted branches, and then Lord Lisle, rising from the dead girl's side, turned to them.

“My men,” he said, “we will carry her home—back to the house where, in a few days' time, she was to have been married—where all her bridal splendor awaits her; then we will hunt the world through to find the one who did the deed.”

There was a murmur of hate and execration. The murderer would have fared badly had he fallen into the hands of those angry men. They then gently raised the silent figure and laid it on the litter, while kindly hands folded the silken robes around her.

Surely the summer sun never shone upon so sad a sight. The bright beauty of all around seemed a cruel mockery. They went through the park, where she never more would tread, and carried their sorrowful burden to the Hall.

"Be cautious," said Lord Lisle. "Do not let the ladies know."

In silence they carried her up the broad marble staircase decorated for her wedding, into the room she had that morning left. In silence and tears they laid her upon the bed where so lately her wearied head had lain. They left some to watch in the darkened room, and then Lord Lisle went down to seek those who waited for him so anxiously.

Mrs. Wyverne started up at his entrance.

"Philip," she cried, "have you found her?"

"Yes," said Lord Lisle, sorrowfully; "we have found her."

"Where, and how?" she asked.

But when he sat down by her side, and tried to tell her, his courage and strength gave way. Lord Lisle buried his face in his hands, and wept aloud.

He told them at last, holding their hands in his, and begging them, for Heaven's sake, to bear it well. Daisy's scream of horror rang in his ear for days afterward. Mrs. Wyverne looked as though she would die from the shock.

"Who can have done it?" cried Daisy, beside herself with grief. "My sister had no enemy; she never did any one wrong or harm."

"She had a secret in her life," said Lord Lisle—"some secret that has cost her dear. Paul, the head gardener, who has just returned from Thornton, tells me he saw Miss Lisle cross the park this morning with a tall, dark

man. He paid no particular attention to him, believing him to be a visitor. Rely upon it, that man is her murderer. Who was he, Daisy, and what had he to do with your sister, who was to have been my wife?"

They went up to the room where weeping attendants watched their dead lady. We leave them there—grief is sacred, and their sorrow was no light one.

Lord Lisle took no rest; the whole country-side was roused to search for the perpetrator of the dark deed; the news ran like wildfire, and created a sensation that was never equaled.

"The beautiful Miss Lisle, who was to have been married next week, had been found dead, shot through the heart."

Lord Lisle telegraphed to London for the first detectives in the city to be sent down at once. They came; the neighboring gentry all joined in the search; a reward of two thousand pounds was offered by Lord Lisle; government offered two hundred more; but all seemed vain. There was no clew, no trace, no sign of the assassin.

A few days passed in mourning and gloom that no words can describe. An inquest was held at the Hall, but no evidence could be procured which threw any light upon the most mysterious murder of modern times. The pistol found near the spot bore neither mark nor name; still, the detectives hoped to obtain some clew from it.

All England rang with the news. People who had seen Miss Lisle in all the splendor of her beauty, could hardly credit the fact. Never was anything so sad; young, lovely, wealthy, about to be married to a man she loved. Popular indignation was aroused as it had seldom been before.

The day came when all that was mortal of the erring, unhappy girl was hidden forever from the sight of men. With all her grand beauty, her glaring faults, Margaret Rivers passed away, and her place knew her no more.

There never was a sight to equal that funeral procession; the guests invited for the wedding came to do more honor to it. The bells that should have rung out a merry peal for her marriage tolled for her death. Those who saw it will never forget it. They will never forget the aged lady whose tears and sighs moved all hearts; the golden-haired sister whose sweet face was, perhaps, the saddest sight of all; or the pale, sorrow-stricken mourner who was so soon to have been the husband of Margaret Rivers.

They laid her to rest in the old family vault in the pretty green church-yard of Thornton. The sun shines over her grave, flowers bloom near it, and birds sing round it. She, with all her faults and sins, her sorrows and fears, will rest well until all earthly rest be ended in this world.

It was the evening of the day of the funeral. The guests had all departed; the confusion was all over, and a somber quiet had fallen upon Lisle Court.

Mrs. Wyverne sat in her own room; Daisy was with her. Although the day was warm a fire burned in the grate; the chill of sorrow had taken possession of the poor lady. Daisy, in her deep mourning-dress sat by her side, trying to forget her own sorrows in soothing that of others.

Lord Lisle was alone in the library, wearied and exhausted by the horror and misery he had passed through, unable to read, to write or to do anything, save think of the scenes he would have given worlds to forget.

It was not yet dark; but he had drawn the blinds, unable to endure the sight of the summer sun.

The butler came in to say that a man requested to see his lordship on very important business.

"I can not see him to-night, Martin," said Lord Lisle, wearily; "I am tired and ill."

"So I told him, my lord," was the reply; "but he implored me so earnestly to ask your lordship for an inter-

view I could not refuse. His manner is so strange, my lord, I can not help thinking he has something of vital importance to communicate."

"What kind of man is he?" asked Lord Lisle.

"Tall and dark, my lord; with a strange, wild face—fierce and handsome."

As the man said the words there suddenly flashed across Lord Lisle the remembrance of the man whom he had seen speaking to Rita on the cliff at Sunbay. Could it be the same, and had he come to tell the secret that belonged to her?

"Show him up," said Lord Lisle; "and, Martin, see that some of the men are at hand to answer the bell."

It was the same—Lord Lisle knew him at a glance—the same man who had rushed past him that day on the cliff.

The butler withdrew and closed the door behind him. Then Lord Lisle, looking in the man's face, found it white, worn, and wild, as though rest, sleep, and peace were strangers to him. He came near the table, and Philip saw that his hands trembled and his lips quivered.

"Sit down," said Lord Lisle, kindly: "you look ill."

The man took no heed of his words.

"My lord," he said, suddenly, "my name is Ralph Ashton. The girl who has been buried to-day, who was to have been your wife next week, was my promised wife four years ago—bound to me by every tie—bound to me by love so passionate, by an oath so solemn, nothing could break it.

"You may look at me, my lord; but my words are true; she was mine, and I loved her—ah, what words can tell how! The ground whereon she stood was precious to me; I worshiped her; I was her slave. She said she loved me. She gave me sweet kisses, sweet words, and loving looks. When I went away to sea she swore to be true until I returned, and then to be my wife.

"When I returned she was gone—she had tried to pre-

vent me from knowing where. I sought her—found her. She flung my love back with scornful words; she roused all the pride and anger in me. I was a man; she turned me into a devil.”

“Why tell me all this?” interrupted Lord Lisle. “Let the poor girl’s faults be buried with her.”

“You must hear it!” he cried; “it concerns you most of all. I meant to keep her secret; but, it seems to me, if her soul is to rest justice must be done.”

He drew a packet of papers from his pocket.

“There, my lord,” he said; “look at these. You will find from them that the girl who lies in Thornton Churchyard duped you as she duped me; deceived and tricked you as she did me. She was not the late Lord Lisle’s daughter, she was the child of Susan Rivers. The fair-haired girl she called her sister is Miss Lisle. Look at these papers and let justice be done.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

Too bewildered for words, Lord Lisle opened the packet before him; from it there fell a picture. He raised it, and saw before him Daisy’s face; the sweet, spiritual face, the tender violet eyes and golden curls of a little child. He recognized it in one moment; then he read the words written in Margaret Wyverne’s hand.

Like one in a dream he opened the letters and read the passages where the young mother spoke lovingly of her little Daisy’s golden curls. Proof was heaped upon proof.

“The strongest proof of all,” continued Ralph Ashton, in the same constrained, passionless voice, “is the fact of her death. She never denied the charge—never. She told me she would rather brave the disclosure than be my wife. If you want further evidence, my lord, go to Deepdale; there are people there who can swear that this is the portrait of the child brought by the strange young lady to

Susan Rivers. They will swear that the dark-eyed, dark-haired girl called Rita was Susan Rivers' own child."

"This was her secret then," murmured Lord Lisle; "poor, unhappy girl!"

"That was her secret, my lord," replied the man. "That you may be sure I am not slandering the dead, I bring you the letters I received from her some weeks since in London. You know her writing—read these."

He read the letters composed with such skillful art. There could be no doubt about them; at the very time she was his promised wife she had corresponded with this man.

Lord Lisle leaned back in his chair, stunned, unable to think or speak.

"She always loved riches and grandeur," continued Ralph Ashton. "She was very beautiful, and she longed for dresses and jewels to set off her beauty. She loved luxury and wealth. I can imagine how it was all done, my lord. The rightful Miss Lisle was away from home when Susan Rivers came to die. She must have trusted the secret to her own child, who used it for her own purposes. Let justice be done, my lord," he continued. "Let the true Miss Lisle take her place."

"I will place the whole matter in the hands of a skillful lawyer. We must have legal as well as moral proof," said Lord Lisle.

"So be it," replied Ralph Ashton. "If inquiry is made there is no fear. Miss Lisle will have her own."

As Lord Lisle sat listening to the strange voice, details long forgotten, words and actions he had thought strange—all rushed up through his mind; each one corroborated the story he had heard. All that seemed a mystery to him was clear now.

Ralph Ashton told the whole story, from the meeting with Rita until that morning when she had met him for the last time, and said she preferred death to becoming his wife.

He stopped then, and his lips, dry and parched, trembled convulsively.

"There remains but one thing more, my lord, to be discussed, and that is the murder. They tell me you have clever detectives here from London. Will you be pleased to let me see one?"

Lord Lisle rang the bell, and in a few minutes Mr. Grey, from Scotland Yard, entered the room.

Ralph Ashton stood up before him.

"You are a police officer?" he asked.

"I am," replied the detective, quietly.

"I surrender myself to you," he said, "for the murder of Margaret Rivers! I shot her through the heart! I killed her; but I swear I never meant it. She insulted me, maddened me, and I fired!"

A cry of rage and horror came from Lord Lisle. He started from his chair.

"Nay, my lord," said the detective, interposing. "Let the law take its course."

"Ah!" said Ralph, "let the law take its course, my lord. I am not worth your anger. See, my hands tremble, and my limbs fail—not from fear. Since she fell dead, and I saw her face, I haven't slept, eaten, or rested. There will be little left for the law to do, my lord. Let it be carried out. Let Heaven judge who is more to blame—the woman who deceived and maddened me, or I who struck her down in the heat of passion and wrath. Let the All-seeing Power above judge. I have done with men!"

"Remove him!" said Lord Lisle. "May God have mercy on him!"

He was led away, and Lord Lisle never saw the man again. Before the time for the trial came, Ralph Ashton died. From the evening he gave himself up, he had never one sensible moment. He died of brain fever; and even

those he had most deeply sinned against were glad that it was so.

His confession of the crime was published without naming the motives that led to it. Most people believed him to have been mad, or to have slain the unhappy girl for plunder. Beyond the few members of the family, no one ever heard the tragic love story of Ralph Ashton.

Lord Lisle sat for some time in silence. He was overwhelmed by the discovery. No shadow of doubt rested on his mind of its truth. He remembered the picture of Lady Sybella Lisle, and Daisy's perfect resemblance to that fair and noble lady. He remembered a thousand trifles, "light as air," yet each bearing a strong confirmation of the truth of the unhappy man's story.

A task lay before him—the news had to be told to Daisy and Mrs. Wyverne. He sent to ask if he could be received, and the answer was "Yes."

Lord Lisle never remembered all the details of that scene. Daisy's tears and sobs; her mingled joy and sorrow; her grief for the unhappy girl who had betrayed her; her unavailing regret that her father had not known the truth before he died.

Her only comfort was that he had loved her so well, and had died in her arms.

"It was strange," said Philip, "how Lord Lisle loved you. Daisy, nature does speak, after all."

She shed tears over the faded letters of her mother.

"I never forgot her," she said. "I dreamed of her continually; and the face that bends over me in my sleep is the same that hangs in my dear father's room. I felt there was something strange, yet I never dreamed of this. You must spare her, Lord Lisle—we must bury her faults in silence."

"Justice must be done to you," said Philip, "and speedily, too."

But, in her sweet, persuasive way, she pleaded for pity

and mercy for the one who was beyond all praise or blame; and Lord Lisle promised to spare her memory and shield her as far as possible.

Skillful lawyers were engaged; the case was well sifted. Lord Lisle, Daisy, and Mrs. Wyverne went to Deepdale. There all legal doubt ended. Many there were who swore that the little child brought by the strange lady to Susan Rivers was no other than Daisy. They recognized her. Every shadow of doubt was cleared up. Lord Lisle's daughter was found at last.

A somewhat garbled statement of the case went abroad, telling that a mistake, now rectified, had been made, leaving every one who read it quite undecided as to whether the detective who managed the business or the late Lord Lisle was most to blame. No one understood it clearly—it was a nine-days' wonder, and then died away, some people thinking it as well that the mistake was not discovered until after the death of her who had been "Miss Lisle."

Lord Lisle, with great pomp and ceremony, introduced Daisy, even as Rita had been introduced before her, to all the dependents and tenants of Lisle Court as the rightful daughter of their late lord. He said a mistake had arisen over the identity of the young ladies, both brought up together, and that circumstances had arisen which explained the error.

She might have been proud of the devotion and homage offered to her, for Daisy's gentle rule had won esteem and liking from all.

They welcomed their young mistress most warmly; but Daisy's greatest comfort was that Rita's name had been spared.

Then, by Lord Lisle's advice, the two ladies went abroad—it was better, he thought; the story would die away; and in his own heart he resolved that, if prayers and love could win her, Daisy should return to England as Lady Lisle.

They went to Italy. Lord Lisle joined a party of friends who were about "doing Egypt and the Pyramids."

During his absence the steward had orders for great alterations at Lisle Court. That part of the wood where the fatal tragedy had taken place was to be destroyed, the trees cut down, and the ground cultivated. The rooms used by the unhappy girl were dismantled and left empty—everything that had belonged to her was given away. The splendid portrait, painted with such exquisite skill, was placed in an old lumber-room. No one could bear either to look upon or destroy the beautiful dark face glowing there.

* * * * *

Three years passed away, and the desire of Lord Lisle's heart was gratified. He wooed and won the lovely, gentle girl he had loved so long and so well.

They returned to Lisle Court, and the whole countryside seemed aroused to welcome them. Lady Lisle was presented at Court, where her delicate beauty and grace made her a great favorite.

She was loved and admired as Rita had never been. Her influence was that of a good and noble woman. The frivolities of fashion did not engross her; gayety did not absorb her whole time and attention. Lord Lisle never knew his own power and capabilities of doing good until his young wife taught him some of the high and holy lessons she had long learned.

They went once to see Rita's grave—a plain slab of white marble. It told the truth, for it said that "Margaret Rivers" slept there.

Years afterward a man, bearing upon his face the marks of long travel, came there. Captain Darcy never forgot the beautiful, brilliant girl he had loved so passionately. The cruel story of her murder came to him over the Indian seas; and then he heard that she was not Lord Lisle's

daughter. It made no difference to him. The first spot he visited in England was Rita's grave.

Had she been living, he would gladly have laid the honors he had won at her feet; every hope and wish, all the love of his heart, was buried with her. Captain Darcy lived his life bravely and well, but it had no more of joy or brightness for him.

* * * * *

One beautiful evening in June a pretty little group was on the lawn of Lisle Court. A lady with golden hair sat at the feet of Mrs. Wyverne, now grown old and feeble. Lord Lisle lay on the grass near them, enjoying at one and the same time the flavor of a cigar and the gambols of his children.

"Daisy," said Lord Lisle, turning to his wife, "that eldest boy of yours is about the greatest tease I ever saw. Come here, little Pearl. What has he done to you?"

A noble boy, with his father's laughing eyes, brought his sister by the hand.

"I have done nothing to her, papa," he said. "Boys do not fight little girls. She cried because I threw a stone at her doll."

Lord Lisle took his young heir in his arms and gave him a lecture on the value of kindness.

The child nestled in his father's arms and listened patiently.

"Papa," he cried, suddenly, "I went with Jennings to-day into some of those empty rooms in the western wing. I saw the picture of a lady with such a beautiful face. Jennings said I must never tell you I had seen it. Who was she, papa?"

At the singular, childish question, a shade of sorrow fell over the fair face of Lady Lisle. Her husband looked at her, and gave a deep sigh.

"It was some one we knew long since," he said, gently — "some one who was very unhappy, and who died,"

Lord and Lady Lisle never told to their children the story of the unhappy girl who for so short a time had borne their name. They never forgot her, even on that bright June evening, when the sun shone upon the blooming flowers, when the birds sung gayly, and the rippling waters of the pretty fountains told of the fair summer, when the air, full of fragrance, whispered of youth, love, and happiness—even then her memory fell upon them like the shadow of a passing cloud.

Lisle Court is a happy home now. Fair children bloom there; Lord Lisle is beloved and esteemed by all who know him. Earth seems to have lavished her most precious treasures, Heaven its choicest gifts, upon Lord Lisle's daughter.

THE END.

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